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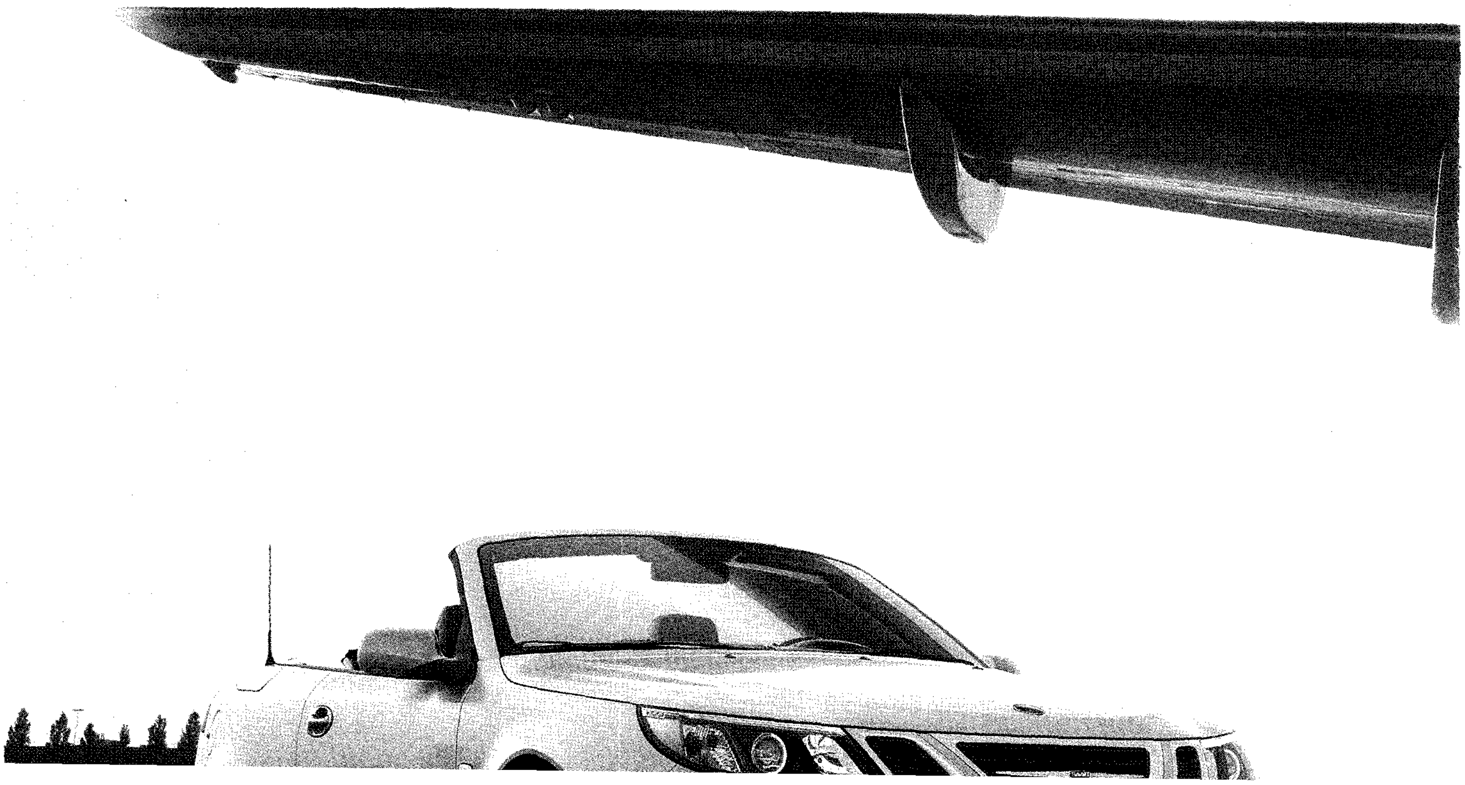

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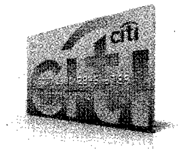

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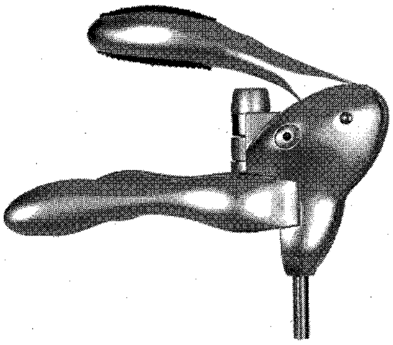

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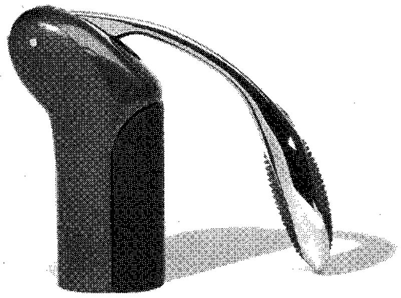

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CONTRIBUTORS

Malcolm Gladwell ("Most Likely to Succeed," p. 36) published his third book, "Outliers: The Story of Success," last month.

George Packer (Comment, p. 29) won a Helen Bernstein Book Award for Excellence in Journalism for "The Assassins' Gate: America in Iraq."

Larry Doyle (Shouts & Murmurs, p. 43) is a screenwriter. His first novel, "I Love You, Beth Cooper," which won this year's Thurber Prize for American Humor, is being made into a film.

Jeffrey Toobin (The Talk of the Town, p. 34) was awarded the 2008 J. Anthony Lukas Book Prize for "The Nine: Inside the Secret World of the Supreme Court."

Roger Rosenblatt ("Making Toast," p. 44) is the author of, most recently, "Beet," a novel. His play "I Must Be Off" will open at the Flea Theatre, in New York, in the spring.

Michael Dickman (Poem, p. 54) will publish his first poetry collection, "End of the West," next year.

Marcellus Hall (Cover) illustrated a children's book of poetry, "City I Love," which is due out in the spring.

David Samuels ("Atomic John," p. 50) is the author of "Only Love Can Break Your Heart" and "The Runner."

Wendell Steavenson ("Marching Through Georgia," p. 64), a freelance journalist, lived in Georgia in the late nineteen-nineties. Her second book, "The Weight of a Mustard Seed," about an Iraqi general, comes out in March.

Steve Brodner (Illustration, p. 64) produced twenty-eight films in the Naked Campaign series, which are available at newyorker.com.

Jonathan Aaron (Poem, p. 69) is the author of three books of poems, including "Journey to the Lost City."

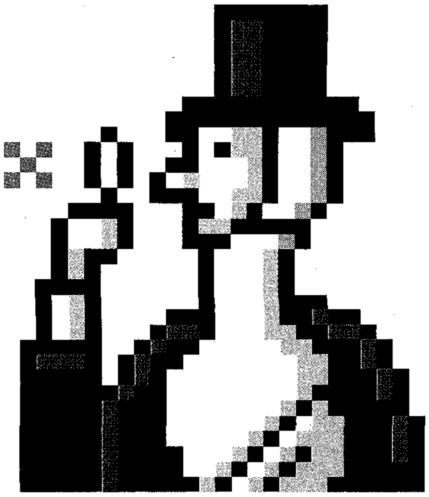
William Trevor (Fiction, p. 74) has published fifteen novels and twelve collections of short stories, including "Cheating at Canasta."

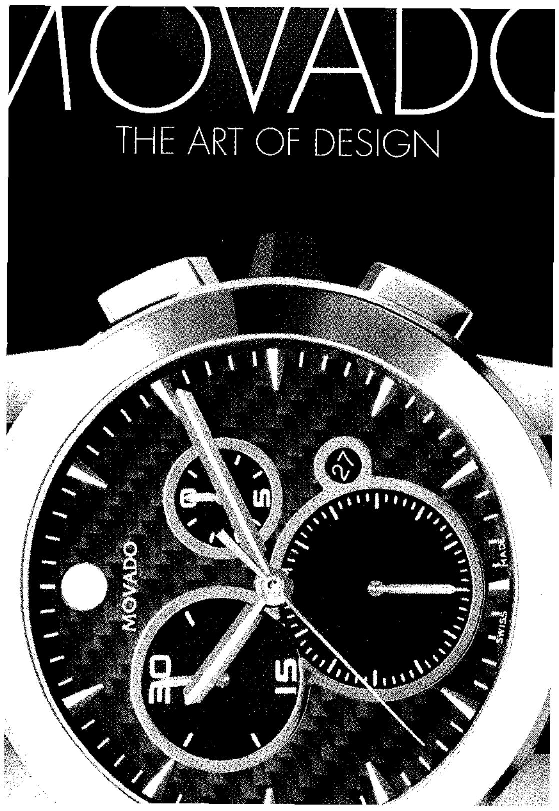
Alex Ross (A Critic at Large, p. 82) received the 2007 National Book Critics Circle Award for Criticism for "The Rest Is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century," which is available in paperback.

James Wood (Books, p. 88) teaches at Harvard, and is the author of, most recently, "How Fiction Works."

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM

Audio: *Dorothy Wickenden* hosts a roundtable about Obama's foreign-policy team. / *Wendell Steavenson* talks about Georgia. / *Alex Ross* takes readers' questions, and shares his five favorite Bernstein recordings. / Photographs and documents of the first atomic bombs. / Our critics' best-of-2008 lists. / The Book Bench, the Cartoon Lounge, Goings On, and blogs by *George Packer, Hendrik Hertzberg, James Surowiecki, Steve Coll,* and *Sasha Frere-Jones.* / From the archive: *Steve Coll* on terrorism, *Scott L. Malcomson* on "The Reader," and every issue back to 1925. / Animated cartoons and the caption contest.

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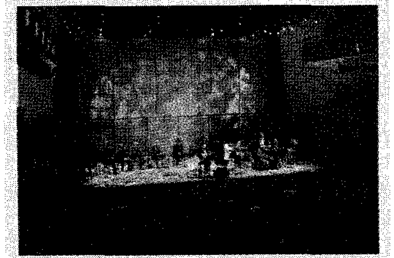
BE THE FIRST TO HEAR ABOUT EVENTS, PROMOTIONS, AND SPECIAL OFFERS FROM *NEW YORKER* ADVERTISERS.

On Monday, October 6, 2008, the Carnegie Hall Notables hosted

REVIVAL: Broadway's Next Act

(Left to right, standing: Jimmy Zankel, Adam Shankman, Duncan Sheik, Jerry Mitchell, Anthony Rapp, and Lin-Manuel Miranda. Left to right, seated: Pia Zankel and Ana Gasteyer.) Photograph: Craig Chesek

REVIVAL was hosted in Zankel Hall, with an after-party at the Russian Tea Room. The panel-discussion event focussed on the fresh approach that composers have recently introduced to Broadway. REVIVAL was underwritten by James and Pia Zankel.



Duncan Sheik performing in Zankel Hall. Photograph: Craig Chesek

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THE MAIL

CLASSMATES

I am not a member of the Harvard Class of 1942, as was Roger Angell, but I am a member of the Princeton Class of 1966—a generation later and one not terribly more advanced in racial understanding (The Talk of the Town, November 17th). There were five black students in my class of eight hundred and thirteen, the largest contingent ever, and one of them became my best friend and roommate. He never experienced an opposing sports team refusing to take the field, as Angell's black classmate Lucien Alexis, Jr., did, but he was the recipient of lots of epithets and hate, both from town and gown. When, in Princeton tradition, we got our beer jackets in senior year, the name he had painted on the back of his was "Boy," because he had heard it so often he figured he might as well throw it back at people. Like Alexis, he died young. How I do wish he were alive to see this day.

Jon Holman
San Francisco, Calif.

THE RIGHT TO WED

Hendrik Hertzberg writes that, notwithstanding the passage of Proposition 8 in California last month, the attempts to ban same-sex marriage through ballot initiatives have "the feel of a last stand" (The Talk of the Town, December 1st). One often overlooked element is that such initiatives violate the Constitution—specifically, equal protection and privacy. In 1964, Californians overwhelmingly passed a proposition that would amend the state constitution to forbid laws banning race discrimination in housing. Yet the amendment was struck down, first by the California Supreme Court and then by the U.S. Supreme Court, citing a principle established decades earlier by Justice Robert Jackson. "The very purpose of a Bill of Rights was to withdraw certain subjects from the vicissitudes of political controversy . . . and to establish them as legal principles to be applied by the Courts," Jackson wrote, in 1943. "Fundamental rights may not be submitted to vote; they depend on the outcome of no election." There is no legitimate state interest in denying gay citizens the same rights as their straight counterparts. Proponents of gay marriage in California have been reticent about pressing their cause on the basis of federal constitutional rights (relying instead on the similar state constitutional guarantees, before that charter was amended by Proposition 8), for fear that the case would end up before the U.S. Supreme Court. But what good are rights if they are not vigorously defended?

Al Meyerhoff
Los Angeles, Calif.

The history of the Mormon Church's "startlingly unconventional forms of wedded bliss" (which reduced women to childbearing possessions of dominant males) might more accurately show why Mormons fought so hard for Proposition 8. The fear of marriage between two people of the same sex is the fear of revealing that the traditional roles of men and women in marriage are not somehow natural or "God-given." Once we admit that marriage between "one man and one woman" is a cultural construct intended to benefit men, the entire patriarchal structure loses its base. The Mormon Church continues to cling to the belief that its definition of marriage, and the more or less subordinate place of women within it, is divine.

Robin Blaetz
Amherst, Mass.

EDITORS' NOTE: On the Contributors page of the December 1st issue, the book "In Sickness and in Power," attributed to the *New Yorker* writer David Owen, was in fact written by a different David Owen.

•

Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number via e-mail to themail@newyorker.com. Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium. All letters become the property of The New Yorker and will not be returned; we regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter.

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UNLEASHING THE POWER OF CONNECTIVITY IN HEALTH CARE.

A health care crisis of communication.
Over the last 50 years medical science has advanced exponentially. Yet the ability of caregivers to access and apply both science and complete patient information is repeatedly impeded by the paper system that contains it. Patient data typically sits in static, inert and functionally truncated paper records. Paper medical records are often incomplete and out of date. Sharing evidence, research findings and simple patient information is usually an arduous, inconsistent and often inaccurate task when paper records produce the data.

Handicapped by a paper-based information non-system that just about every other industry has left behind, health care is in a massive communication morass that cries out for technological intervention and help.

Connectivity. The overdue next step.
Caregivers should be linked to one another for every patient. Patients should have consistent access to both caregivers and medical information. The 21st century health care system should build a continuous loop of information around the patient that will give clinicians secure access to all data, on all relevant patients, all of the time.

The power and value of complete connectedness should be self-evident. Full and secure access to data will give physicians visibility into patient status and health history, improving diagnosis and delivery of care. Information retrieval that took days, will take minutes. Or less.

The future system should open unprecedented new diagnostic tools. Physicians should be able to instantly share imaging and test results with colleagues across the hall or across the country. Patients should have instant access to their own records and be able to send, transmit or carry it from one provider to another. Secure, computerized data sharing can reduce errors, redundancies, lost information and costs.

A culture of continuous learning and connected care.
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Maximizing information for the clinician means optimizing care for the patient. Done well, we believe a computerized care support system can help both to restore and enhance each physician's original mission. The right system provides more time with patients, better information about care and less time with traditional paperwork. The right system also needs to be focused on the patient's need for affordable, well informed, customized and compassionate care. We believe new computer systems are needed to lead our nation's health care reform agenda into the 21st century. For us, right now, it's a work in progress and progress is being made.

Get more information at kp.org/future

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The boys of the Saint Thomas Choir. Photograph by Gus Powell.

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
14	15	16	10	11	12	13

THIS WEEK

NIGHT LIFE
FACTORY SHIFT

The Knitting Factory is moving from Manhattan to Brooklyn, but before the Tribeca space closes the wildly flexible and inventive underground rap group Anti-Pop Consortium will take over the club for a nightlong program featuring bands and other attractions. (See page 15.)

ART
BODY POLITIC

With an unsettling mix of brutal honesty and erotic lyricism, the South African painter Marlene Dumas confronts issues of race, sex, religion, and motherhood in her figurative paintings. The exhibition "Measuring Your Own Grave," at MOMA, is the first major survey of the artist's work in the U.S. (See page 16.)

DANCE
TWISTED TURN

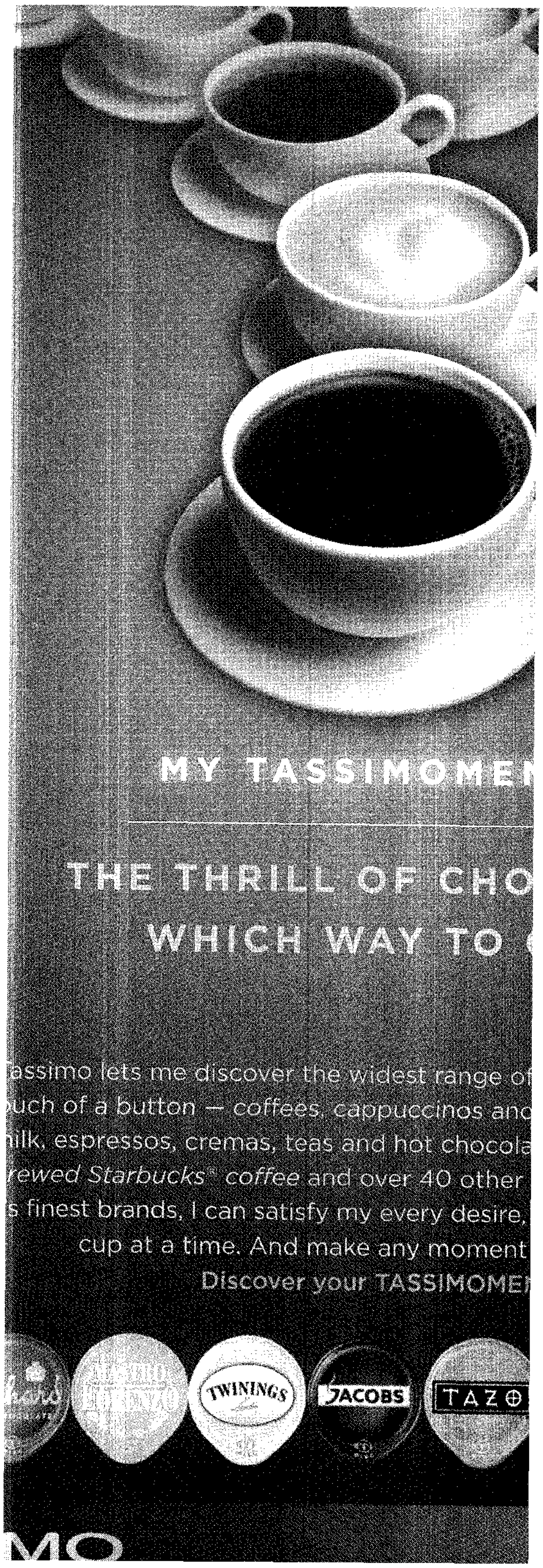
Of all the veterans of postmodern dance, David Gordon—whose witty, frequently text-driven works can turn in on themselves self-referentially—is the one with the best sense of humor. At Dance Theatre Workshop, he performs his 1982 piece "Trying Times (Remembered)" with customary irreverence. (See page 18.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
CENTENNIAL SOUNDS

Amazingly, Elliott Carter's hundredth birthday is upon us. The centenarian composer, who was born a month after William Howard Taft was elected President, is the subject of at least three tributes, including performances by the Boston Symphony, members of the New York Philharmonic, and a star roster of chamber musicians at Zankel Hall. (See pages 20 and 22.)

MOVIES
EUROPA, AMERICA

Throughout her career, the Polish-born director Agnieszka Holland, who went to film school in Prague, has taken on the turbulent issues of modern history. MOMA's retrospective features her more familiar films, such as "Europa Europa," and her American films, including "To Kill a Priest," "The Third Miracle," and "Shot in the Heart," as well as the episodes of "The Wire" that she directed. (See page 25.)



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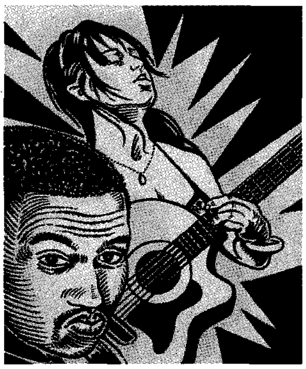
CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
BALL CONTROL

There is no reason to attribute curatorial skills to the FM radio station Z100 just because its annual Jingle Ball happens to be a perfect cross-section of pop: the event is programmed according to sales figures. Still, it is a grand primer in current pop events. All varieties of weirdness, luck, and untrammeled ego can be found in Kanye West. Chris Brown is our Bobby Darin, while Ne-Yo will be our Burt Bacharach, if we're lucky. Katy Perry is an opportunist blessed with the year's great pop-rock song ("Hot N Cold"), and Leona Lewis is the latest incarnation of Debby Boone, only new because we haven't spent ten years with her boneless music. David Archuleta is David Cassidy, and Brandy is Dianne Reeves, a lifer who will eventually get her due. Paramore are led by Hayley Williams, who might be the Joan Jett of the emo scene, better and harder than the kids could know right now. And there will be an appearance by Rihanna, who continues to have hits long after her last good single, "Umbrella," which is close to two years old now. She could be the 2008 version of anyone.

—Sasha Frere-Jones



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THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

BECKY SHAW
Peter DuBois directs Gina Gionfriddo's comedy, about a newlywed couple who fix up two friends. Previews begin Dec. 16. (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422.)

CHAIR
Theatre for a New Audience presents a play by Edward Bond, an allegory of oppressive government security, directed by Robert Woodruff. In previews. Opens Dec. 11. *(The Duke on 42nd Street,* 229 W. 42nd St. 646-223-3010.)

THE CRIPPLE OF INISHMAAN
At Atlantic Theatre Company, in a co-production with Galway's Druid Theatre, Garry Hynes directs Martin McDonagh's play, set in 1934, about a crippled orphan living in an Irish town, who becomes enthralled with a film crew that arrives to make a movie. In previews. (336 W. 20th St. 212-279-4200.)

A LIGHT LUNCH
At the Flea, the world première of a play by A. R. Gurney, about the meeting of a Texas politician and a literary agent. Previews begin Dec. 12. (41 White St. 212-352-3101.)

NATHAN THE WISE
Richard Sewell adapts the Gotthold Lessing dramatic poem, about a Jewish merchant in Muslim Jerusalem during the Christian Crusades. Melissa Maxwell directs. Opens Dec. 9. (Pearl, 80 St. Marks Pl. 212-598-9802.)

PAL JOEY
At Studio 54, Roundabout Theatre Company presents the Rodgers and Hart musical from 1940, with a book adaptation by Richard Greenberg. Joe Mantello directs a cast that includes Martha Plimpton and Stockard Channing. In previews. (254 W. 54th St. 212-719-1300.)

REWRITE
Joe Iconis wrote and John Simpkins directs three short musical comedies about deadlines. Opens Dec. 10. (Urban Stages, 259 W. 30th St. 212-868-4444.)

SHREK THE MUSICAL
*DreamWorks Theatricals presents the musical ad-*aptation of the film, with a book and lyrics by David Lindsay-Abaire ("Rabbit Hole") and music by Jeanine Tesori ("Caroline, or Change"). Jason Moore ("Avenue Q") directs; Brian d'Arcy James and Sutton Foster star. In previews. Opens Dec. 14. (Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 212-239-6200.)

WOMEN BEWARE WOMEN
Red Bull Theatre revives Thomas Middleton's Jacobean satire of sixteenth-century sexual politics in England and Italy. In previews. Opens Dec. 14. (Theatre at St. Clement's, 423 W. 46th St. 212-352-3101.)

NOW PLAYING

BEASLEY'S CHRISTMAS PARTY
The Keen Company presents Booth Tarkington's comedy, directed by Carl Forsman. (Clurman, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

THE BLACK MONK
Kevin Newbury directs a chamber musical by Wendy Kesselman, based on Chekhov's story about an artist from a small village who must negotiate the challenges of his rising success. Austin Pendleton stars. (Beckett, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

DANCE DANCE REVOLUTION
Les Freres Corbusier ("Hell House," "A Very Merry Unauthorized Children's Scientology Pageant") offer the première of their latest show, directed by Alex Timbers, with original songs by Gary Adler ("Altar Boyz"), about a dance prophet named Moonbeam Funk who saves the day in a society where dancing is illegal. (Ohio, 66 Wooster St. 212-868-4444.)

GEOMETRY OF FIRE
Mel is a young sniper, just back from Baghdad, who became unhinged several months ago, after he blew the back off of a teen-age boy's head. T-Bone is the American-born son of a Saudi Arabian man dying of cancer caused by chemical weapons deployed by the U.S. military. Like anonymous enemies in the field, these strangers hate each other on home ground (an empty bar on the outskirts of Washington, D.C.). Over a period of a few weeks, both seek help for their unmanageable feelings, but to no avail—their chance meetings get scarier and scarier. The playwright Stephen Belber has a lot of ideas about war, idealism, the ways we are all connected, and the difficulty of changing one's habitual behavior, but, in this case, they remain muddy concepts, unre*alized by the director, Lucie Tiberghien, and the* talented actors on the stage. (Rattlestick, 224 Waverly Pl. 212-868-4444.)

HILLARY: A MODERN GREEK TRAGEDY WITH A (SOMEWHAT) HAPPY ENDING
In Wendy Weiner's engaging if uneven cornball political satire, directed by Julie Kramer, the ups and downs in the life of the former First Lady, current senator, and newly appointed Secretary of State designate are recast as the by-product of a longstanding feud between Aphrodite and Athena. Surprisingly—and eerily—the Greek-tragedy conceit works so well with this epic figure that one can almost excuse the play's many ideological missteps, including the implication that Clinton's ambitions boil down to daddy issues. Weiner does an impressive job of mining the media detritus of the Clinton years—the stained dress, the Starr Report, Bill's penchant for fast food—for the right materials to paint a portrait that is both loving and lacerating. (Living Theatre, 21 Clinton St. 212-868-4444.)

HOME
Three actors perform twenty-five roles in Samm-Art Williams's 1980 play. Set in the nineteen-fifties and sixties, it tells the story of a man who leaves his family in North Carolina and heads for New York City. (Signature Theatre Company, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

IMPROBABLE FREQUENCY
Arthur Riordan and Bell Helicopter wrote this musical, presented by Dublin's Rough Magic Theatre Company, about a British code breaker who journeys to Ireland during the Second World War to *investigate a radio talk show. Lynne Parker directs.* (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

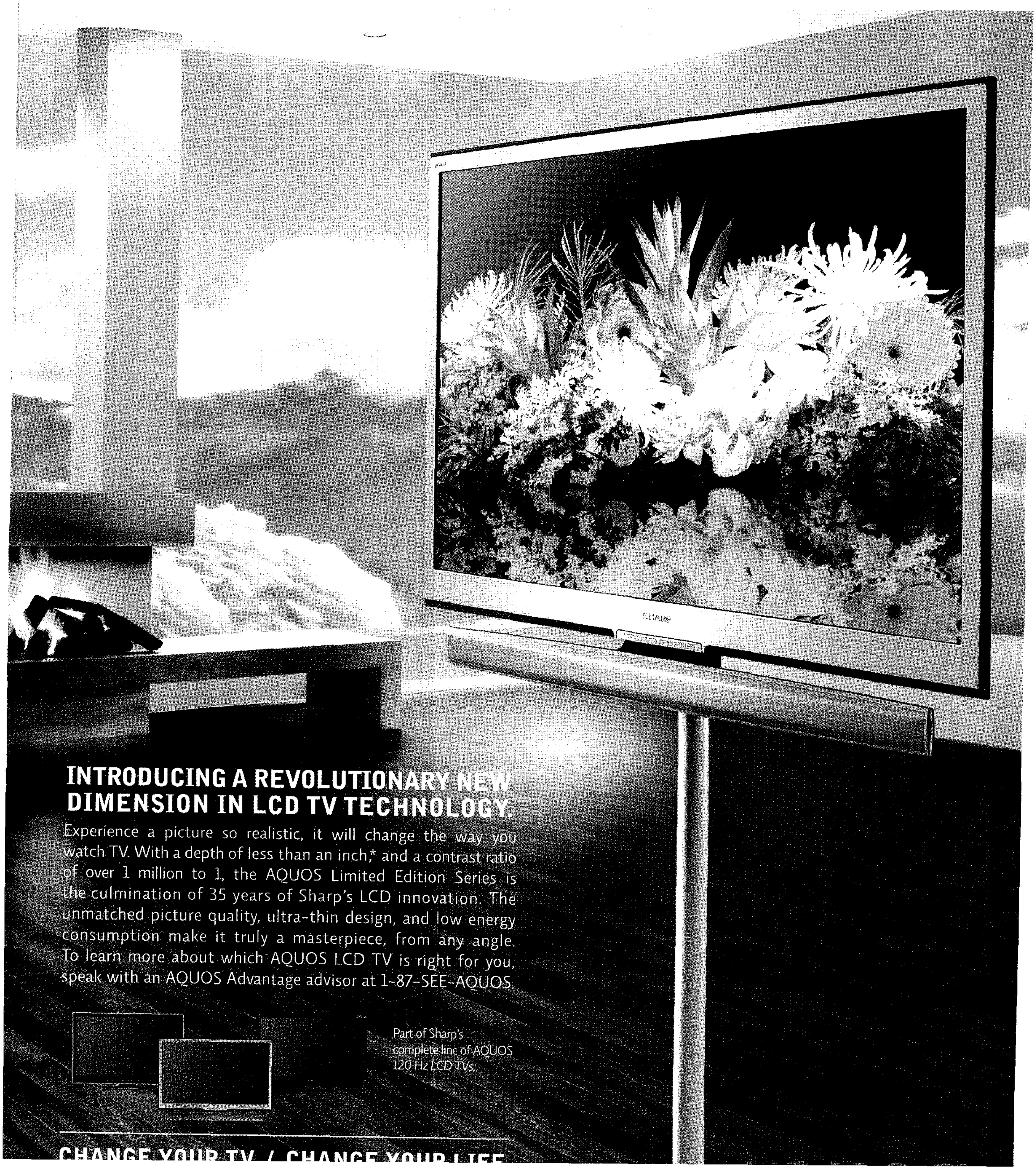
IRVING BERLIN'S WHITE CHRISTMAS
Walter Bobbie has done a fine job staging this adaptation of the 1954 movie, which bequeathed us such songs as "Sisters" and "Count Your Blessings Instead of Sheep." A pair of vaudeville performers (Stephen Bogardus and Jeffry Denman, standing in for Bing Crosby and Danny Kaye) join a pair of dames (Kerry O'Malley and Meredith Patterson) and put on a big show in a cozy Vermont inn. The sets, the costumes, the dreaded Christmas cheer—it's all done with class, commitment, and the tiniest degree of self-awareness; your saccharine meter may not go off once. The cast is better than it needs to be, and the snow, when it comes, is like manna from the god of schmalz. (Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 212-307-4100.)

LIZA'S AT THE PALACE....
Liza Minnelli returns to Broadway with a show of song and dance. (Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 212-307-4100.)

LONDON CRIES
Di Trevis and Frank McGuinness wrote this musical, commissioned for the Old Vic in London, based on Henry Mayhew's book "London Labour and the London Poor." Dominic Muldowney wrote the music; Trevis directs. (Irondale Center, 85 S. Oxford St., Brooklyn. 212-352-3101.)

PHILIP ROTH IN KHARTOUM
David Bar Katz wrote this LAByrinth Theatre Company development production, about a troubled couple who come to blows during a game of truth or dare at a party. John Gould Rubin directs. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

PRAYER FOR MY ENEMY
Playwrights Horizons presents the New York première of a play by Craig Lucas ("Prelude to a



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Kiss"), directed by Bartlett Sher, about an Iraq-war soldier and his alcoholic father, who is a Vietnam vet. Starring Victoria Clark, Michele Pawk, and Jonathan Groff. (416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

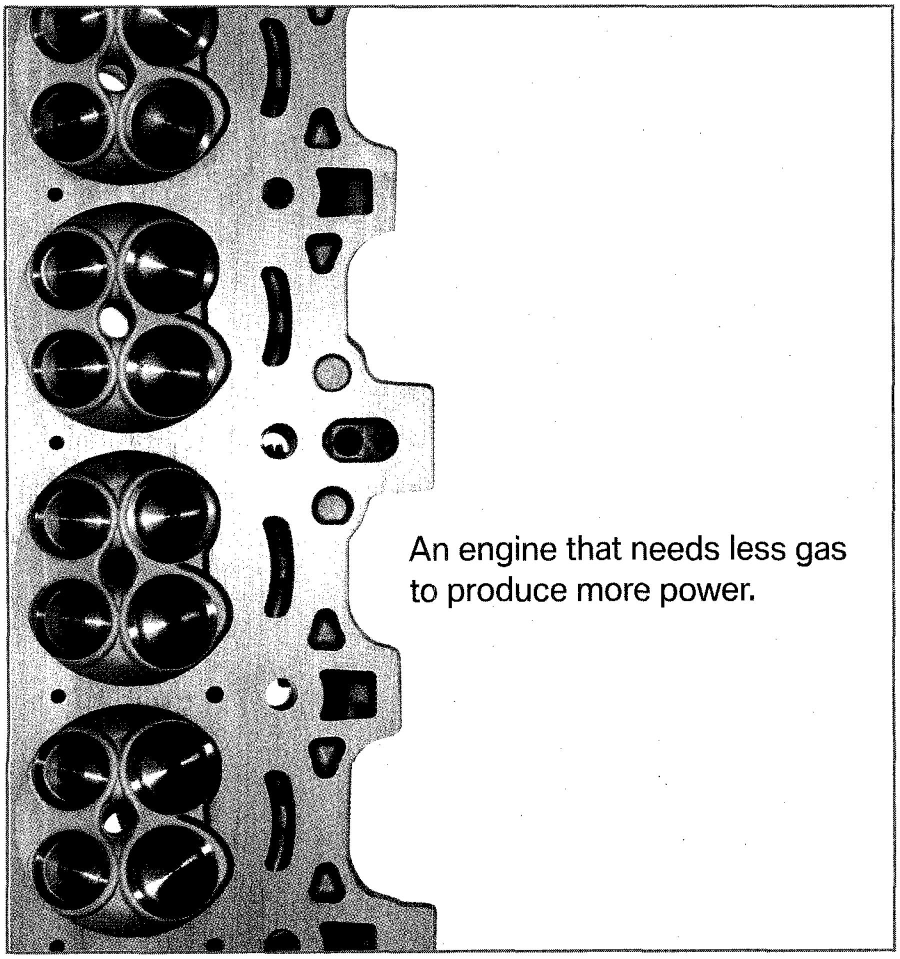
ROAD SHOW
Stephen Sondheim's latest musical (with a book by John Weidman) is based on the real-life tale of Addison and Wilson Mizner, brothers whose real-estate dealings helped turn Florida into a vacation destination for the leisure class. In this fast-paced, alternately confusing and illuminating show, Weidman gives us sketches, while Sondheim is intent on making a painting. The actors are caught between these two extremes, as is the audience, unsure where to focus. (Reviewed in our issue of 12/1/08.) (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

SLAVA'S SNOWSHOW ON BROADWAY
The Russian clown Slava Polunin returns with his snowstorm spectacular. (Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

TOO MUCH MEMORY
Keith Reddin and Meg Gibson wrote this contemporary adaptation of the Antigone myth, which won the New York Fringe Festival's Outstanding Play award this year. (Fourth Street Theatre, 83 E. 4th St. 212-868-4444.)

Also Playing

ALL MY SONS: Schoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **ARIAS WITH A TWIST:** HERE Arts Center, 145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. 212-352-3101. **THE ATHEIST:** Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-352-3101. **AUGUST: OSAGE COUNTY:** Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **AVENUE Q:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **BACK BACK BACK:** Manhattan Theatre Club, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. **BILLY ELLIOT THE MUSICAL:** Imperial, 240 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **BLACK WATCH:** St. Ann's Warehouse, 38 Water St., Brooklyn. 718-254-8779. **BLASTED:** SoHo Rep, 46 Walker St. 212-352-3101. **BOEING-BOEING:** Longacre, 220 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **DIVIDING THE ESTATE:** Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **EQUUS:** Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **GARDEN OF EARTHLY DELIGHTS:** Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane. 212-307-4100. **GYPSY:** St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **HAIRSPRAY:** Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 212-307-4100. **IN THE HEIGHTS:** Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 212-239-6200. **JERSEY BOYS:** August Wilson, 245 W. 52nd St. 212-239-6200. **THE LION KING:** Minskoff, 200 W. 45th St. 212-307-4747. **THE LITTLE MERMAID:** Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St. 212-307-4747. **MAMMA MIA!:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 212-239-6200. **A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS:** American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300. Through Dec. 14. **MARY POPPINS:** New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4747. **MONTY PYTHON'S SPAMALOT:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **SATURN RETURNS:** Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200. **THE SEAGULL:** Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **SLEEPWALK WITH ME:** Bleecker Street Theatre, 45 Bleecker St. 212-239-6200. **SOUTH PACIFIC:** Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200. **SPEED-THE-PLOW:** Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. **SPRING AWAKENING:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **STREAMERS:** Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300. **TAKING OVER:** Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555. **13:** Bernard B. Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE 39 STEPS:** Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **WHAT'S THAT SMELL: THE MUSIC OF JACOB STERLING:** New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200. **WICKED:** Gershwin, 222 W. 51st St. 212-307-4100.



NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

BLENDER THEATRE AT GRAMERCY
127 E. 23rd St. (212-307-7171)—Dec. 16: The ambitious prog-metal power trio and critics' favorite **King's X.** Starting out in Missouri some two decades ago, the band embellished its metal with melodic flourishes and intricate arrangements. They topped that with thoughtful, spiritually conscious lyrics. No wonder they didn't make much of a commercial splash. King's X inched closer to the mainstream with their album "XV" earlier this year, but that big crossover hit still eludes them.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—Dec. 11: Boston's **Letters to Cleo's** big break came with the song "Here & Now," a track from their début album that landed in heavy MTV rotation as well as on prime-time TV's "Melrose Place." The pixieish vocalist Kay Hanley's rapid-fire delivery of the song's chorus lent it a distinctive sound, but after four albums and ten years together the band split, at the beginning of this decade. Following a string of projects (including singing backup for Miley Cyrus), Hanley has re-formed the band for a reunion tour.

CARNEGIE HALL
57th St. at Seventh Ave. (212-247-7800)—Dec. 10: **"The McGarrigle Christmas Hour."** The holidays are a time for family, but if you're looking for harmony you might prefer the McGarrigles' to your own. The Montreal songbirds **Kate** and **Anna** are counting on a passel of visitors—Kate's kids, **Martha** and **Rufus Wainwright,** along with a stream of friends, including **Emmylou Harris, Lou Reed, Laurie Anderson,** and **Linda Thompson** and her son **Teddy**—to contribute to the festivities.

EUROPA NIGHT CLUB
98-104 Meserole Ave., at Manhattan Ave., Greenpoint, Brooklyn (718-383-5723)—Dec. 11: The pioneering New York punk-electronica duo **Suicide** was formed in 1970 by the Bronx native Martin Rev, on keyboards and electronic miscellanea, and the gritty Brooklyn-reared visual artist Alan Vega (né Bermowitz), on vocals. The pair's unique sound is made powerful by its stark minimalism, its only components being Rev's hypnotic, eerie keyboard riffs and spare programmed drumbeats and Vega's visceral poetry layered on top. While the group was too raw for the mainstream, it was hugely influential on everyone from U2 to Ministry to Bruce Springsteen, whose "State Trooper" from the acoustic album "Nebraska" is indebted to Suicide's "Frankie Teardrop," a harrowing ten-and-a-half-minute journey into the mind of a suicidal factory worker. In the early days, when they opened for the likes of the Clash, Suicide's iconoclastic, uncompromising musical vision was often met with violence from fans expecting more rock orthodoxy. Audiences now greet them with the reverence they deserve.

FILLMORE NEW YORK AT IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—Dec. 12: Reviled upon their début, in 1993, for being shamelessly corporate, Seattle's **Candlebox** borrowed heavily from the style and aesthetic of genre forerunners like Soundgarden and Pearl Jam. Despite the antipathy, the band scored a couple of radio-friendly hits (notably "Far Behind") and later signed to Madonna's ill-fated label. The hits dried up in short order, and the band vanished for ten years, until a new album, "Into the Sun," came out earlier this summer. Despite the passage of time, Candlebox's sound is unchanged, like a flannel-clad mosquito preserved in amber.

HAMMERSTEIN BALLROOM
Manhattan Center, 311 W. 34th St. (212-307-7171)—Dec. 12: Kinks-reunion rumors are swirling like crazy all of a sudden, but don't hold your breath. Other than Yo La Tengo, who backed him for a few dates in 2000, **Ray Davies's** current group is the strongest he's had since the great, long-lived

British Invasion band called it quits, in the mid-nineties. And the man himself is always a joy. Opening will be Brooklyn's **Locksley,** a power-pop outfit.

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—Dec. 11: Those seeking an early start to the Hanukkah season should consider this musically tinged book party celebrating the release of "And You Shall Know Us by the Trail of Our Vinyl," a nostalgic, schmalz-filled journey to the heart of Jewish pop music. This fascinating and lavishly illustrated book, written by Roger Bennett and Josh Kun, views Jewish-American history through the lens of lost gems like the Yiddish version of "Raindrops Keep Failing on My Head," by the Barry Sisters (née Clara and Minnie Bagelman, birthplace: the Bronx), and Johnny Mathis's torchy rendition of the Aramaic Yom Kippur centerpiece, "Kol Nidre," complete with a Nelson Riddle-style orchestral arrangement. For this performance, a small combo led by the keyboardist **Paul Shapiro** will back several of the book's stars, including **Irving Fields,** a ninety-three-year-old Judeo-mambo pioneer (of "Bagels and Bongos" fame), and **Sol Zim,** a Queens-based cantor, Kiss fan, and composer who staged one of the first Jewish rock operas, at the Hollis Hills Jewish Center in 1974.

KNITTING FACTORY
74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (212-219-3132)—Dec. 10: The turntable magicians the **X-ecutioners** juggle beats like there's no tomorrow. Dec. 12: **Anti-Pop Consortium** presents "Meltdown," a night featuring the **Bomb Squad, Dragons of Zynth, Chin Chin, Sugar Shack Burlesque,** and other acts. Note: The club is closing this location at the end of December, and it has plans to move to Brooklyn.

MADISON SQUARE GARDEN
Seventh Ave. at 33rd St. (212-307-7171)—Dec. 12: **Kanye West, Ne-Yo, Katy Perry, Chris Brown, Rihanna, Leona Lewis, Paramore, David Archuleta** and many others spike the musical punch at Z100's Jingle Ball. Dec. 15-16: **Neil Young** and his group deliver their vast catalogue of country rock with the same power they had decades ago. **Wilco,** which would headline just about any other bill, opens.

WARSAW
261 Driggs Ave., Brooklyn (212-307-7171)—Dec. 12: The **Butthole Surfers.** The psychedelic punk band founded by Gibby Haynes and Paul Leary in San Antonio in 1982 survives, evolves, and can still bring the shock and awe—with just enough of a sense of humor to keep your head from exploding. The electronic trio **Black Dice,** Brooklyn's own, opens.

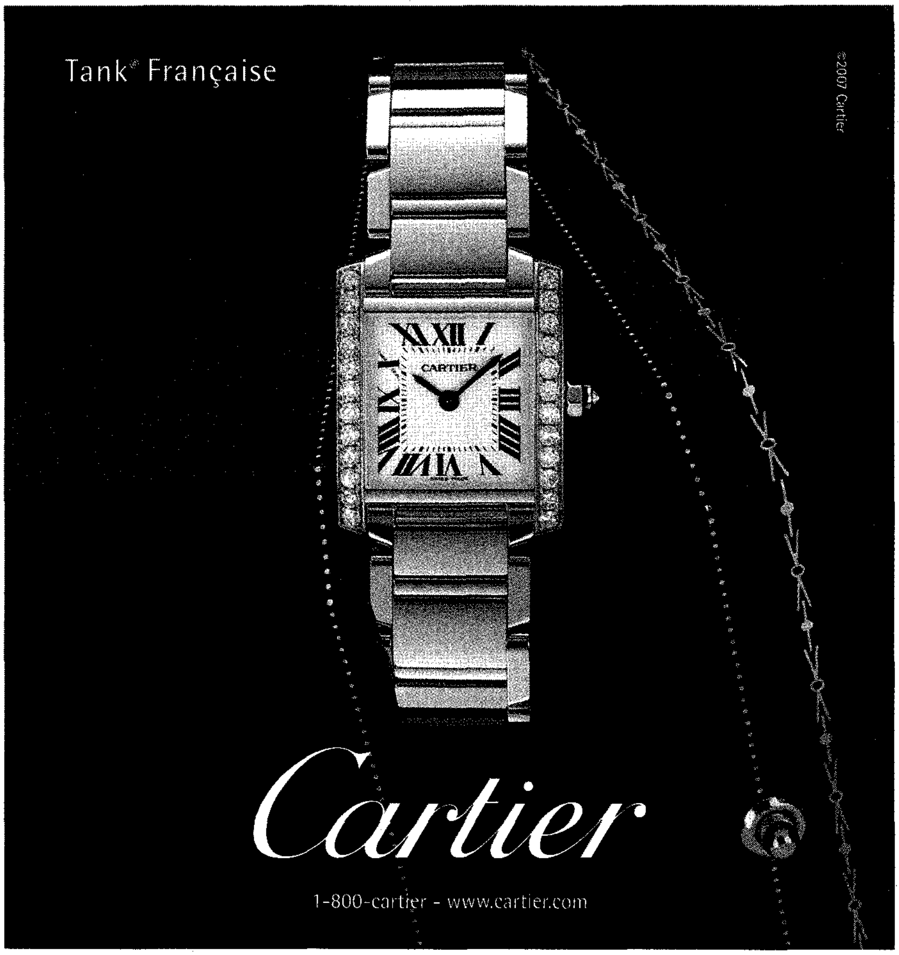
JAZZ AND STANDARDS

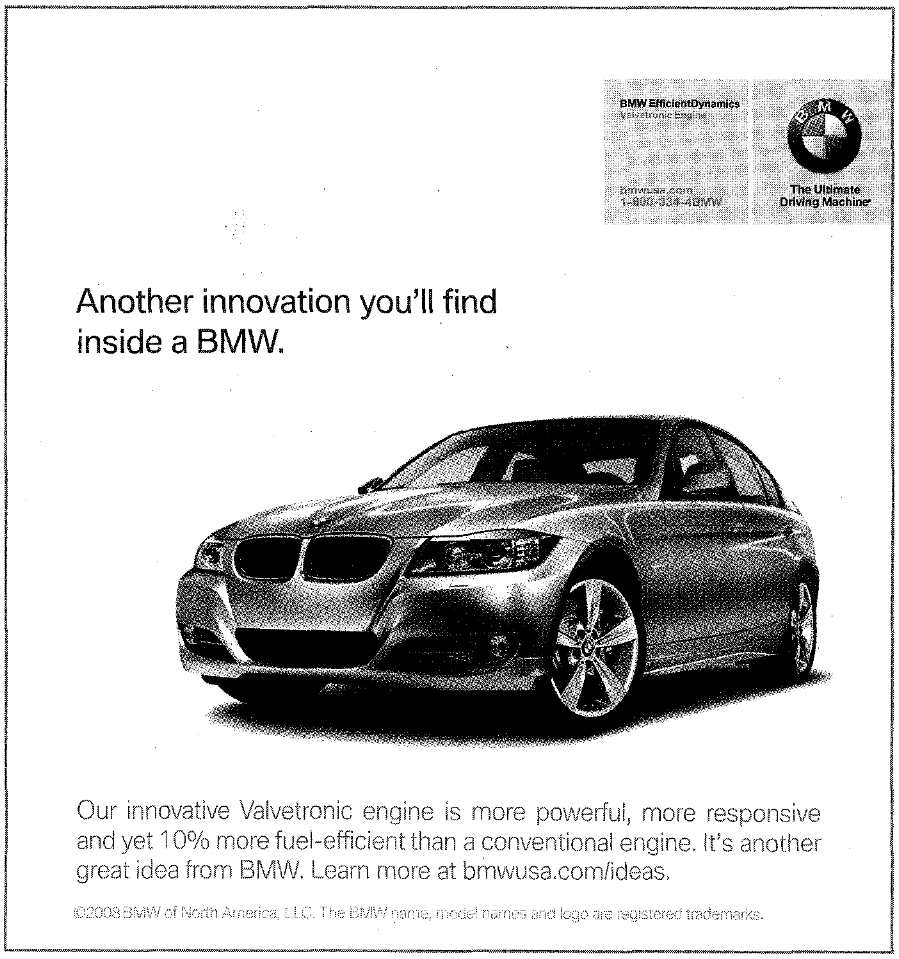
BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—Dec. 9-13: **Roy Haynes** is decades older than his sidemen, but the octogenarian drum legend still makes his younger musicians sweat. Employing a style that's both classic and eccentric and eschewing nostalgia of any sort, Haynes is an in-the-moment phenomenon.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Dec. 9-14: The pianist **McCoy Tyner's** volcanic strength may have diminished somewhat, but his imagination is still as strong as ever. He's here celebrating his seventieth birthday with the dancer **Savion Glover** and a special guest each night. The guitarist **Marc Ribot** joins him the first night, followed by the saxophonists **Joe Lovano** (on Dec. 10) and **Ravi Coltrane** (Dec. 11) and the guitarists **Bill Frisell** (Dec. 13) and **John Scofield** (Dec. 14).

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—The tenor-saxophone giant **George Coleman** (here with his quintet Dec. 9-14) is joined by **Mike Ledonne,** on organ, and **Eric Alexander,** on saxophone.

FEINSTEIN'S AT LOEWS REGENCY
540 Park Ave., at 61st St. (212-339-4095)—Through Dec. 30: "The Sinatra Holiday Project" combines two of **Michael Feinstein's** most successful musical endeavors, his recent reinterpretation of the work of Ol' Blue Eyes and his ec-





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umenical show of seasonal songs. It's a two-for-one evening of artful mirth that's perfect for the times.

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Dec. 10-14: With soulful balladeering now tempering his titanic eruptions, **Pharoah Sanders** has become the complete saxophonist. It's been quite an evolution for the roaring iconoclast who once made even late-period Coltrane sound reserved; these days Sanders's naked expressivity is the crucial element in his openhearted approach. He's joined here by the pianist **William Henderson,** the bassist **Nat Reeves,** and the drummer **Joe Farnsworth.** Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.**

The pianist Bill Charlap and his trio salute Leonard Bernstein, at Zankel Hall.

JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER
Broadway at 60th St. (212-721-6500)—Dec. 11-13: The trombonist **Wycliffe Gordon** seasons his holiday program with a touch of Jelly Roll Morton and other New Orleans luminaries. Dec. 11-13: The gospel vocalist **Kim Burrell** returns to the Allen Room.

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—Dec. 11-14: **Ben Riley's Monk Legacy Septet.** Led by the former Thelonious Monk drummer Riley and featuring the ingenious arrangements of the trumpeter **Don Sickler,** this tribute band with a twist substitutes guitar for the expected piano. The Mingus tribute bands are in rotation on Mondays.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Dec. 9-14: The **Heath Brothers.** Though the late bassist Percy has been replaced by **Peter Washington,** this now classic unit still boasts the instrumental wizardry of the saxophonist **Jimmy** and drummer **Albert (Tootie) Heath.** Note: The bassist **Corcoran Holt** fills in on the 10th. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ZANKEL HALL
Carnegie Hall, 57th St. at Seventh Ave. (212-247-7800)—Dec. 10: **Bill Charlap.** Carnegie Hall is currently celebrating Leonard Bernstein, who was born a hundred years ago, but the pianist Charlap was way ahead of them. Four years ago, he released the sterling tribute album "Somewhere: The Songs of Leonard Bernstein." Then, as now, he's joined by his in-synch trio mates **Peter Washington** on bass and **Kenny Washington** on drums.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Beyond Babylon: Art, Trade, and Diplomacy in the Second Millennium B.C."** Through March 15. ♦ **"The Philippe de Montebello Years: Curators Celebrate Three Decades of Acquisitions."** Through Feb. 1. ♦ **"Giorgio Morandi, 1890-1964."** Through Dec. 14. ♦ **"Art and Love in Renaissance Italy."** Through Feb. 16. ♦ **"Landscapes Clear and Radiant: The Art of Wang Hui (1632-1717)."** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"Raqib Shaw."** Through March 1. ♦ **"New York, N. Why?: Photographs by Rudy Burckhardt, 1937-1940."** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"The Essential Art of African Textiles: Design Without End."** Through March 22. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Marlene Dumas: Measuring Your Own Grave."** Opens Dec. 14. ♦ **"Joan Miró: Painting and Anti-Painting, 1927-1937."** Through Jan. 12. ♦ **"Van Gogh and the Colors of the Night." Through Jan. 5.** ♦ **"Pipilotti Rist: Pour Your Body Out (7354 Cubic Meters)."** Through Feb. 2. ♦ **"New Photography 2008: Josephine Meckseper and Mikhael Subotzky."** Through Jan. 5. ♦ **"Focus: Sol LeWitt."** Through June 29. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8. The museum will remain open until 8:45 one Monday per month through April, beginning Dec. 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"Theanyspacewhatever."** Through Jan. 7. ♦ **"Catherine Opie: American Photographer."** Through Jan. 7. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 7:45.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3600)—**"William Eggleston: Democratic Camera, Photographs and Video, 1961-2008."** Through Jan. 25. ♦ **"Alexander Calder: The Paris Years, 1926-1933."** Through Feb. 15. ♦ **"Corin Hewitt: Seed Stage."** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"Signs of the Times."** Through Jan. 11. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"The Black List Project: Timothy Greenfield-Sanders and Elvis Mitchell."** Through March 29. ♦ **"Gilbert & George."** Through Jan. 11. ♦ **"Jesper Just: Romantic Delusions."** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"Burning Down the House: Building a Feminist Art Collection."** Through Feb. 8. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and weekends, 11 to 6.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—**"Climate Change: The Threat to Life and a New Energy Future."** Through Aug. 16. ♦ **"The Horse."** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"The Butterfly Conservatory: Tropical Butterflies Alive in Winter."** Through May 25. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

COOPER-HEWITT NATIONAL DESIGN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 91st St. (212-849-8300)—**"Wall Stories: Children's Wallpaper and Books."** Through April 5. ♦ **"Solos: Tulou/Affordable Housing for China."** Through April 5. (Open Mondays through Thursdays, 10 to 5, Fridays, 10 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, noon to 6.)

DIA AT THE HISPANIC SOCIETY OF AMERICA
Audubon Terrace, Broadway at 155th St. (212-926-2234)—**"Zoe Leonard: Derrotero."** Through Sept. 7. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 4:30, and Sundays 1 to 4.)

THE DRAWING CENTER
35 Wooster St. (212-219-2166)—**"Matt Mullican: A Drawing Translates the Way of Thinking."** Through Feb. 5. (Open Tuesdays through Fridays, 10 to 6, and Saturdays 11 to 6.)

FRICK COLLECTION
1 E. 70th St. (212-288-0700)—**"Andrea Riccio: Renaissance Master of Bronze."** Through Jan. 18. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 5.)

JEWISH MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—**"Chagall and the Artists of the Russian Jewish Theatre, 1919-1949."** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"The Dead Sea Scrolls: Mysteries of the Ancient World."** Through Jan. 4. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 11 to 5:45, and Thursdays, 11 to 8.)

MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM
225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—**"Drawing Babar: Early Drafts and Watercolors."** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"Protecting the Word: Bookbindings of the Morgan."** Through March 29. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Fifth Ave. at 103rd St. (212-534-1672)—**"Broken Glass: Photographs of the South Bronx by Ray Mortenson."** This compact exhibition of fifty mostly small black-and-white photographs, all made and printed between 1982 and 1984, is a frightening reminder of how devastating an economic downturn can be. Mortenson's South Bronx is a ghost town of abandoned apartment blocks and rubble-filled lots, with no sign of human presence save what the vandals have left behind. His most indelible images are of trashed interiors, which he describes as "like tombs . . . sealed up, broken open and plundered." Amid the peeling plaster and shattered mirrors, Mortenson looks for signs of the former occupants and finds children's graffiti, one platform shoe, and, pointedly, a wall-size painted target. Through March 9. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)

NEW MUSEUM
235 Bowery, at Prince St. (212-219-1222)—**"Mary Heilmann: To Be Someone."** Through Jan. 26. ♦ **"Live Forever: Elizabeth Peyton."** Through Jan. 11. ♦

DAVID COWLES

“Museum as Hub: Six Degrees.” Through Jan. 11. (Open Wednesdays and weekends, noon to 6, and Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 10.)

PALITZ GALLERY
11 E. 61st St. (212-754-5121)—**“Michelangelo: The Man and the Myth.”** Through Jan. 4. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 10 to 7. To buy tickets, visit ticketweb.com.)

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER
22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—**“NeoHooDoo: Art for a Forgotten Faith.”** Through Jan. 26. ♦ **“Gino De Dominicis.”** Through Feb. 9. ♦ **“Leandro Erlich: Swimming Pool.”** Through April 13. ♦ **“Yael Bartana.”** Through Jan. 19. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM
144 W. 125th St. (212-864-4500)—**“Barkley L. Hendricks: Birth of the Cool.”** Through March 15. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, and Sundays, noon to 6, and Saturdays, 10 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

JOHN MARIN
These ten lyrical yet burly watercolors are built from gestural sweeps and quick dry lines in a palette that insinuates vivid color while remaining almost muted in effect. The earliest work, titled “Mountains, the Tyrol,” was painted in 1910 and included in the 1913 Armory Show. It projects a Sturm und Drang of sun and shadow. Crashing seascapes, painted at Marin’s retreat in Maine, are juxtaposed with elegant little pencil sketches of the Brooklyn Bridge from the twenties and thirties, which evoke the poems of his fellow Stieglitz protégé Hart Crane. Through Dec. 20. (Ward, 44 E. 74th St., 212-744-7306.)

KIT RANK
An opium smoker works on a laptop and Communist cadres play Monopoly in Rank’s picture-puzzle vision of the Far East. Flat color and a shallow, stacked perspective push her stylized Chinese and Japanese motifs close to the picture plane. Surfaces buzz with pattern and scenes teem with event. Rank’s ostensible theme is globalization, presented as an overpopulated but not unpleasant farce, in which canned bamboo shoots and Heinz baked beans are culinary co-equals, and Google, Chanel, and Mickey Mouse assume the stature of household gods. Through Jan. 17. (McKee, 745 Fifth Ave. 212-688-5951.)

“ISABEL AND OTHER INTIMATE STRANGERS”
Hard-drinking, thrice-married, and legendarily beautiful, Isabel Rawsthorne was a twentieth-century muse whose conquests included Alberto Giacometti and Francis Bacon. Both artists loved Rawsthorne—Giacometti passionately, Bacon platonically—but their major affinity, seen in the portraits collected here, is the nervously charged gesture. Bacon’s slashing, scalloped lines and throbbing pinks and purples play off Giacometti’s attenuated bronzes, and the seventy-odd works, loaned from private and museum collections including MOMA’s and the Met’s, tell a tale of obsession. The sculptor’s figure studies in oil are particularly powerful, at once wan and excruciating. Through Dec. 13. (Gagosian, 980 Madison Ave. 212-744-2313.)

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

ANNE CHU
Chu’s mytho-folkloric figurative sculptures looked stranger a few years ago, but they’re still a fine olio of the formal and the mystical. Totemic bears totter on the floor or balance on pedestals. Bronze goats sport minimalist cubes around their middles, a frisky homage to Rauschenberg’s Pop icon “Monogram” (in which a tire encircles a taxidermied Angora). Dangling from a rope above Chu’s menagerie is a serene, Buddha-like head, cast in aluminum and sliced in half through the cheekbones. The incision lends it the affect of a sly smile—or a blissful blessing. Through Dec. 21. (303 Gallery, 547 W. 21st St. 212-255-1121.)

DANA HOEY
Hoey’s most intriguing and absorbing exhibition in years is a puzzle you’ll never solve. Thirty-eight color photographs of people, landscapes, and odd things suggest a loose narrative revolving around various climatic conditions: freeze, thaw, drought, flood, ash. The seasonal cycle of rot and renewal is complicated here by more extreme situations and the sense that Hoey’s world, no matter how scientifically observed, is largely imaginary. Close-ups of fungi, salamanders, sprouting plants, and unusual bugs alternate with images of solitary old women (shamans?), young people, and children frolicking in a field. Is this a postapocalyptic brave new world? Or a hallucination with no beginning and no end? Through Jan. 24. (Petzel, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-680-9467.)

ZOE STRAUSS
Strauss’s 2007 exhibition in this gallery was a memorable knockout, but she tops it with a follow-up that’s even more aggressive and assured. With a nod to Walker Evans and Robert Frank, she calls the show “America: We Love Having You Here,” and it’s a love-it-or-leave-it affair. Strauss’s subjects are the damaged, the deranged, and the stubbornly ordinary—dead-end kids, tough broads, crackheads, angry guys—in their natural habitat. But there’s nothing anthropological or judgmental about the work. Strauss calls her pictures “unsparing and unsentimental,” but they’re also angry, engaged, and surprisingly bighearted. Through Jan. 10. (Silverstein, 535 W. 24th St. 212-627-3930.)

Short List

TOMMA ABTS: Zwirner, 525 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070. Through Dec. 23. **PETAH COYNE:** Lelong, 528 W. 26th St. 212-315-0470. Through Dec. 13. **ROBERT GOBER / FELIX GONZALEZ-TORRES:** Rosen, 525 W. 24th St. Through Jan. 31. **JÁN MANČUŠKA:** Kreps, 525 W. 22nd St. 212-741-8849. Through Jan. 10. **KAY ROSEN:** Gray, 526 W. 26th St. 212-399-2636. Through Jan. 10; Lambert, 550 W. 21st St. 212-242-3611. Through Jan. 3. **KATIA SANTIBAÑEZ:** Danese, 535 W. 24th St., 212-223-2227. Through Dec. 20. **ERIK SCHMIDT:** Dee, 545 W. 20th St. 212-924-7545. Through Jan. 10. **CINDY SHERMAN:** Metro Pictures, 519 W. 24th St. 212-206-7100. Through Dec. 23. **JONAS WOOD:** Kern, 532 W. 20th St. 212-367-9663. Through Dec. 23. **“LOOKING BACK”:** White Columns, 320 W. 13th St. 212-924-4212. Through Dec. 13. **“THE WORLD IS ALL THAT IS THE CASE”:** Hudson Franklin, 508 W. 26th St. 212-741-1189. Through Dec. 20.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

CLIFFORD OWENS
Owens’s performance at his opening—the kind of freewheeling participatory happening for which he’s best known—ended with the artist surrendering his naked body to the audience. The show, by comparison, is anticlimactic. The curious hodgepodge of photographs includes scenes from a collaborative, mud-slinging performance with William Pope.L and colorful but solemn portraits of African-Ecuadorian children. The show’s sweet spot is an image of Owens’s head nestled under the pregnant belly of his Ecuadorian partner. A grid of framed white-on-black texts attempts a playful mix of sexual innuendo and art-critical and racial commentary but instead strikes a note of post-conceptual prosaism. Through Dec. 14. (On Stellar Rays, 133 Orchard St. 212-598-3012.)

GALLERIES—BROOKLYN

RENATE ALLER
This German photographer’s large-scale seascapes are all taken from the same location on Westhampton Beach, but they range from minimalist studies to dramatic views of storm clouds and

TABLES FOR TWO
SECESSION

ECESSIO
Secession

HONORE BROWN

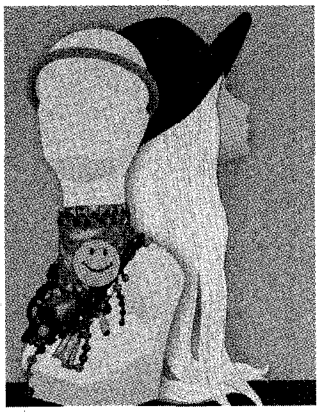
30 Hudson St. (212-791-3771)—Secession, David Bouley’s French-Italian bistro, used to be Danube, David Bouley’s formal Viennese dining room, which abutted Bouley, David Bouley’s flagship restaurant, which is now Bouley Bakery & Market, David Bouley’s gourmet grocery store. (The new Bouley is across the street. A Bouley Japanese restaurant is also under way.) The problem is not Bouley’s ambition—any neighborhood is lucky to have an infusion of capital, and charcuterie, in these lean days—but, rather, that he seems to be rejiggering his holdings with greater haste than heed. A nine o’clock reservation might mean a ten o’clock seating. The bar check still says Danube. It’s Dubai on Duane Street.

Secession went up fast: barely two weeks after Gael Greene chronicled bickering between Bouley and the Tuscan chef Cesare Casella, with whom Bouley collaborated on Italian dishes (“Fuck you if you want to be French!” went an argument about lemon in the calamari), the place was open for business. (The calamari, for the record, is prepared with “ocean broth”: lemon, clam juice, onion, garlic, and herbs.) It’s a glorious rehab, preserving the plush intimacy of Danube—Klimt-style canvases, pendant lamps, scarlet lacquer, gold and teal accents—but not the heavy drapes. The de-stuffification is an achievement in itself: a room so beautiful deserves to be seen by as many people as possible. As for the menu, a narrower focus would have helped. The one Bouley finally settled on has eighty items—including geoduck clams, terrines, kebabs, baby goat, coconut shrimp, and a watery spaghetti carbonara. Variety alone is not a cause for complaint, but Bouley’s execution is all over the place: a salad of gizzards and red-wine-poached egg is a musky pleasure, while the one with foie gras and Jerez dressing is overly citrusy and almost oxymoronically bland. Same with the steaks: there’s a nice piney kick to the steak tartare, while the skirt steak—the dish you want to depend on—is overcooked and stringy. The Wiener schnitzel barely seems fried, as if whoever prepared it was scared it would come out greasy (there are flashes of its former glory in the accompanying lingonberry chutney, in which you can make out the individual berries, like a tapioca). Desserts are rickety—a *vacherin* with the texture of Play-Doh, a freezer-burned strawberry parfait. Fortunately, Bouley doesn’t shy from improvements. Fix her up, chef. (Open daily for lunch and dinner. Entrées $12-$32.)

—Lauren Collins

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
CHANGE UP

Bad markets can do good things for art, as the spectacle-industrial complex of fairs and festivals gives up ground to the grit of experiment. Consider the rough-and-tumble "Looking Back," at White Columns, as a preview of



coming attractions. For its third annual, the gallery invited Jay Sanders, a visionary young curator with an eye for the offbeat and a knack for reviving the unsung, to round up the best things he's seen this year. The list of thirty or so artists has its predictable share of hip up-and-comers (like K8 Hardy, whose coven of mannequin heads owe a thank-you note to Rachel Harrison) and avant-garde nabobs (like Paul McCarthy, whose ferocious sound piece is tucked into a pillow-strewn room, though only the bravest will linger). But Sanders casts his net wide, in the cross-pollinated spirit of Constructivism or the heyday of Judson Church. That pair of low-slung pianos in the middle of the room? They're reincarnations from Richard Foreman's fever dream of a play, "Deep Trance Behavior in Potatoland."

—*Andrea K. Scott*

glistening water. Richard Misrach's unabashedly gorgeous panoramic vistas of San Francisco Bay, also shot from the same spot each time, would seem to be the model here. Hiroshi Sugimoto's photos of sea and sky provide a more rigorous template, one that Aller honors but softens, primarily through her subtle use of color. There are no blazing sunsets here, only shades of blue, white, and gray—a cool, chic version of the rainbow. Through Dec. 20. (Klompching, 111 Front St. 212-796-2070.)

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET
Balanchine's "Nutcracker," from 1954, offers sugarplums and snowflakes, plenty of scintillating dancing, and Tchaikovsky's wonderfully imaginative score. (David H. Koch, Lincoln Center. 212-721-6500. Dec. 9, Dec. 11, and Dec. 16 at 6; Dec. 10 at 2 and 6; Dec. 12 at 8; Dec. 13 at 2 and 8; and Dec. 14 at 1 and 5. Through Jan. 3.)

BENJAMIN MILLEPIED / DANSES CONCERTANTES
Millepied's pickup company, now populated by a select group of up-and-coming American Ballet Theatre dancers, returns to the Joyce with a program that includes two works by Millepied, with live music. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Dec. 9-10 at 7:30, Dec. 11-13 at 8, and Dec. 14 at 2 and 7:30.)

DARIA FAÏN HUMAN BEHAVIOR EXPLORERS
For "The Extent to Which," Faïn and the poet-architect Robert Kocik transform the Center for Performance Research into an installation that's immersive down to the seating. Pipes under the risers give off vibrations, and the sound score incorporates information relayed by sensors attuned to the audience's heat. Lighting, music, movement—everything belongs to the feedback loop. Faïn's choreography draws on the five-elements theory of Chinese medicine and looks something like Tai Chi in fast-forward. Each evening the performance is presented twice, the second time in reverse order. (361 Manhattan Ave., Brooklyn. 718-715-1520. Dec. 10-13 at 7 and 9 and Dec. 14 at 3.)

NUDANCE FESTIVAL
The Riverside Theatre's annual showcase for new and lesser-known choreographers starts out with an open rehearsal and a Q. & A. with Karen Gayle, of Xodus Dance Collective, and Corey Baker, of Ballet Noir. Over the following three nights, those two are joined by a diverse group of eight others displaying new work. (91 Claremont Ave. 212-870-6784. Dec. 10 at 7 and Dec. 11-13 at 8.)

ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATRE
The fiftieth-anniversary season stays festive with a greater than usual percentage of live music. Performances of Hope Boykin's it-takes-a-village dance "Go in Grace" continue to include the harmonizing ladies of Sweet Honey in the Rock, and the blues of Ailey's early "Blues Suite" are belted by Kenny Brawner. This week's big event is the première of "Festa Barocca," forty-five minutes of Handel choreographed by Mauro Bigonzetti. Best known on these shores for his work with New York City Ballet, the Italian dance-maker has a dramatic streak that might suit Ailey dancers better. (131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Dec. 10-12 at 8, Dec. 13 at 2 and 8, Dec. 14 at 3 and 7:30, and Dec. 16 at 7. Through Jan. 4.)

"YORKVILLE NUTCRACKER"
Dances Patrelle's charming production sets the action at Gracie Mansion, circa 1895, with Teddy Roosevelt among the guests. The lovely Jenifer Ringer, from New York City Ballet, does the honors as the Sugar Plum Fairy in her frozen kingdom—the Bronx Botanical Gardens, of course—accompanied by her Cavalier, N.Y.C.B.'s Jared Angle. (Kaye Playhouse, Hunter College, Park Ave. at 68th St. 212-722-7933. Dec. 11-12 at 7, Dec. 13 at 2 and 7, and Dec. 14 at noon and 5.)

TANZTHEATER WUPPERTAL PINA BAUSCH
After taking on Palermo, Buenos Aires, and Istanbul, Pina Bausch applies her impressionistic approach to the wide canvas of India, in "Bamboo Blues." She has softened since her "Café Müller" days, and the interactions she depicts have been shorn of their hopeless, masochistic brutality. But the party dresses and obsessively whipped cascades of long hair are still there, as are the surrealistic vignettes and endlessly repeated chains of movement. And the delightful *kuchipudi* dancer Shantala Shivalingappa, last seen with Bausch in "Nefés," is back. (BAM's Howard Gilman Opera House, 30 Lafayette Ave. 718-636-4100. Dec. 11-13 and Dec. 16 at 7:30 and Dec. 14 at 3. Through Dec. 20.)

DAVID GORDON / PICK UP PERFORMANCE CO(S.)
Gordon is the kind of choreographer who likes to return to favorite themes (the interpenetration of life and art), methods (as much talking as dancing), and even props (chairs), but not to revive old dances. Expect his reconstruction of his 1982 work "Trying Times (Remembered)" to treat the original with as much fidelity as the original treated Balanchine's "Apollo." Gordon's regal wife, Valda Setterfield, who was in the original cast, provides the most obvious continuity. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. Dec. 11-13 at 7:30. Through Dec. 20.)

"FRÄULEIN MARIA"
This year's expanded version of Doug Elkins's enormously popular "Sound of Music"-inspired revue features an enlarged cast, including Elkins, the voguer Archie Burnett, David Parker, and Deborah Lohse. (Joe's Pub, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555. Dec. 11-12 at 7:30 and Dec. 13 at 1:30 and 7:30.)

LEESAAR THE COMPANY
The Israeli duo Lee Sher and Saar Harari bring "February," a new two-part evening, to La Mama. The first part is a one-sided conversation written and performed by Sher, a chilling evocation of needy isolation, while the second takes Harari's exploration of violence-tinged sensuality from last year's "Geisha" a step further, with the aid of two powerful Taiwanese dancers, Jye-Hwei Lin and Hsin-Yi Hsiang. (74A E. 4th St. 212-475-7710. Dec. 11-13 at 7:30 and Dec. 14 at 5.)

NEW YORK THEATRE BALLET / "THE NUTCRACKER"
Tired parents may opt for this lively production of the Christmas classic, only an hour long, with inspired sets modelled after nineteenth-century English toy theatres. (Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. 212-355-6160. Dec. 12 at 10 A.M. and Dec. 13-14 at 11 A.M., 1, and 3:30. Through Dec. 21.)

"STREB AT SLAM: INVISIBLE FORCES"
Elizabeth Streb invites audiences into her Lab for Action Mechanics, in order to share some new toys. (SLAM, 51 N. First St., Brooklyn. 212-352-3101. Dec. 12 at 7, Dec. 13 at 3 and 7, and Dec. 14 at 3. Through Dec. 21.)

VALENTINA KOZLOVA DANCE CONSERVATORY / "THE NUTCRACKER"
One of the top ballet teachers in New York, Kozlova puts together a yearly "Nutcracker" with her students. This year, the role of the Sugar Plum Fairy will be danced by the talented sixteen-year-old Whitney Jensen, who recently won a top award at the Varna International Ballet Competition. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. Dec. 13 at 4 and 8.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
HOLIDAY MUSIC

SAINT THOMAS CHOIR: "MESSIAH"
The renowned choir of men and boys, which sings in the luxuriant Gothic splendor of its church on Fifth Avenue, has always set a standard in local "Messiah" performances because of its strong connection to the finest traditions of Anglican music-making. John Scott leads it in two performances accompanied by the Baroque group Con-

SILJA GÖTZ

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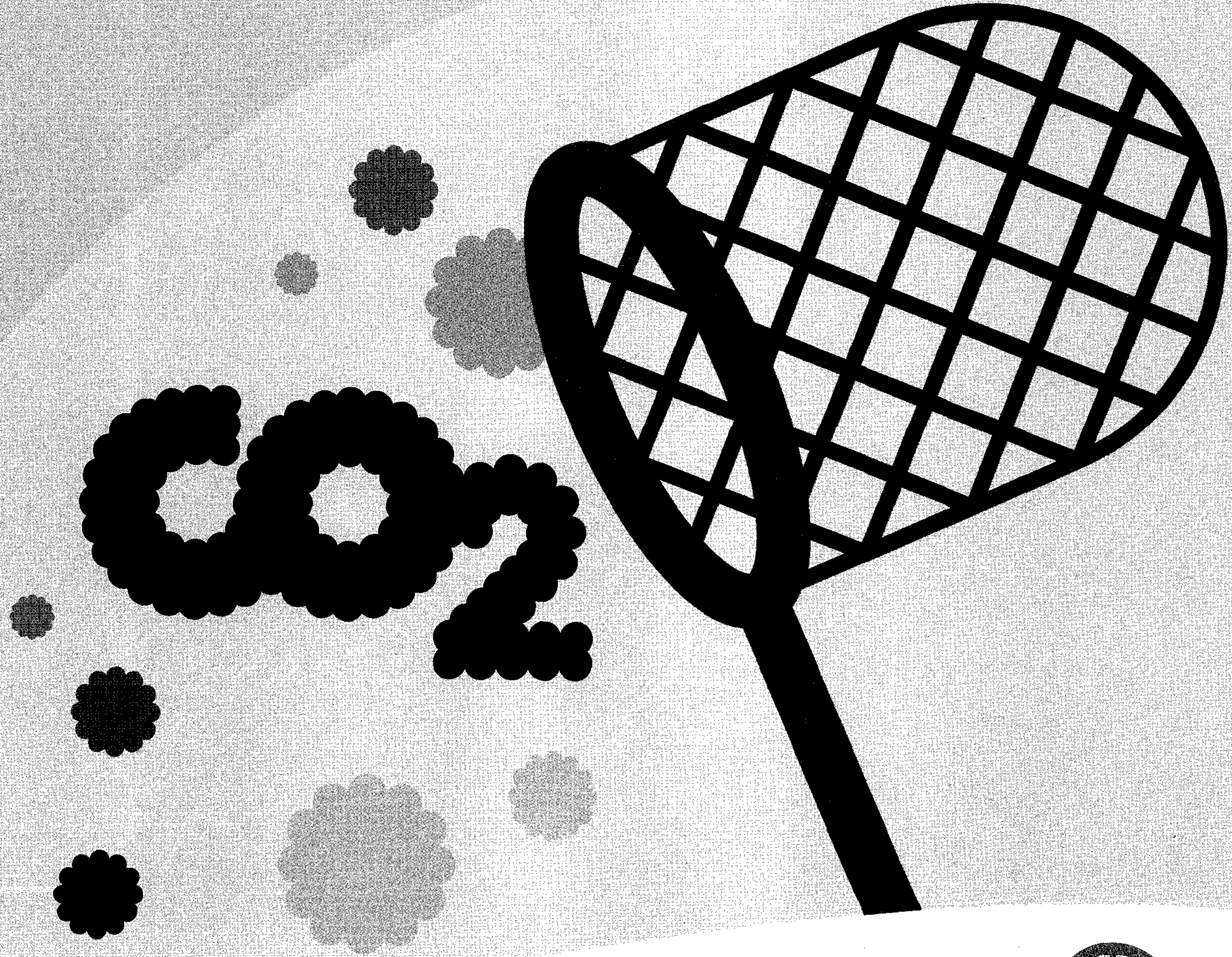


cert Royal. (Fifth Ave. at 53rd St. Dec. 9 and Dec. 11 at 7:30. www.saintthomaschurch.org.)

"WORKS & PROCESS" SERIES: PROKOFIEV'S "PETER AND THE WOLF"
The wolf arrives with a difference over at the Guggenheim Museum: a fabulous production featuring narration by Isaac Mizrahi, an art installation by the Campana Brothers, and music by the Juilliard Ensemble, conducted by George Manahan. (Fifth Ave. at 89th St. 212-423-3587. Dec. 13-14 at 2:30 and 4 and Dec. 15-16 at 4 and 5:30.)

CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER: THE BRANDENBURG CONCERTOS
The ruddy good spirits of Bach's masterworks have long made them holiday favorites. Some of the most alluring performances can be found at the annual concerts by the Society, which offers them this year at the Rose Theatre. (Broadway at 60th St. 212-875-5788. Dec. 14 at 5 and Dec. 16 at 7:30.)

OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
After an absence of nearly sixteen years, Seiji Ozawa returns to the Met to conduct a dramatically alert, emotionally harrowing account of Tchaikovsky's **"Queen of Spades."** The cast features Ben Heppner as Ghermann, the indefatigable Maria Guleghina as Lisa, and Felicity Palmer, one of opera's great character actresses, as the Countess. (Dec. 10 at 8 and Dec. 13 at 12:30. These are the final performances.) ♦ Renée Fleming, the Met's unrivalled prima donna, is on a Massenet tear, and so it is Massenet that she will get for her next production—specifically **"Thaïs,"** which is best known on this side of the Atlantic as a vehicle for Beverly Sills. The story mixes sentimental religiosity with Orientalist decadance; Massenet's music is varied, tuneful, and a model of craft. With Michael Schade and Thomas Hampson; Jésus López-Cobos. (Dec. 11 at 8.) ♦ Last season, it took four tenors and two sopranos to get through six shows of **"Tristan und Isolde."** Peter Seiffert and Katarina Dalayman, the lovers in this month's revival, wrestle admirably with their herculean parts; luckily, Daniel Barenboim is on hand for his long overdue début and conducts a performance full of violent rapture. Kwangchul Youn, a dependable bass new to this run, sings King Marke; Michelle DeYoung contributes a voluptuous Brangäne. (Dec. 12 and Dec. 16 at 7.) ♦ **"Don Giovanni,"** with a cast featuring not only the magnetic Erwin Schrott in the title role but also Tamar Iveri, Dorothea Röschmann, Matthew Polenzani, and Ildebrando D'Arcangelo; Lothar Koenigs. (Dec. 13 at 8.) ♦ Just in time for the holidays, Franco Zeffirelli's bustling and beloved production of **"La Bohème"** returns to the house, with a cast led by Maija Kovalevska, Susanna Phillips, Ramón Vargas, and Mariusz Kwiecien; Frédéric Chaslin. (Dec. 15 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

BAM: "LIGHTNING AT OUR FEET"
The always exciting composer Michael Gordon, collaborating with the visual wizards of Ridge Theatre, has composed a "multimedia song cycle" based on poems and letters by Emily Dickinson; it features the vocalists Jennifer Charles, Leah Coloff, Courtney Orlando, and Bora Yoon (the latter three of whom double on instruments). (BAM Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. Dec. 9 and Dec. 11-13 at 7:30.)

MANHATTAN SCHOOL OF MUSIC OPERA THEATRE: "LATER THE SAME EVENING"
The school presents the New York première of a new opera (with music by John Musto and a libretto by Mark Campbell) inspired by five paintings by Edward Hopper. (Borden Auditorium, Broadway at 122nd St. 917-493-4428. Dec. 10 and Dec. 12 at 7:30 and Dec. 14 at 2:30.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
Though the pianist Leon Fleisher returned to performing two-hand repertory several years ago, he still tours with the left-hand classics—such as Prokofiev's Piano Concerto No. 4, which he will offer on a program conducted by Lorin Maazel that also features music by Bach (the Brandenburg Concerto No. 3), Mozart, and Falla ("El Amor Brujo"). (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656. Dec. 11 at 7:30 and Dec. 12 at 2.)

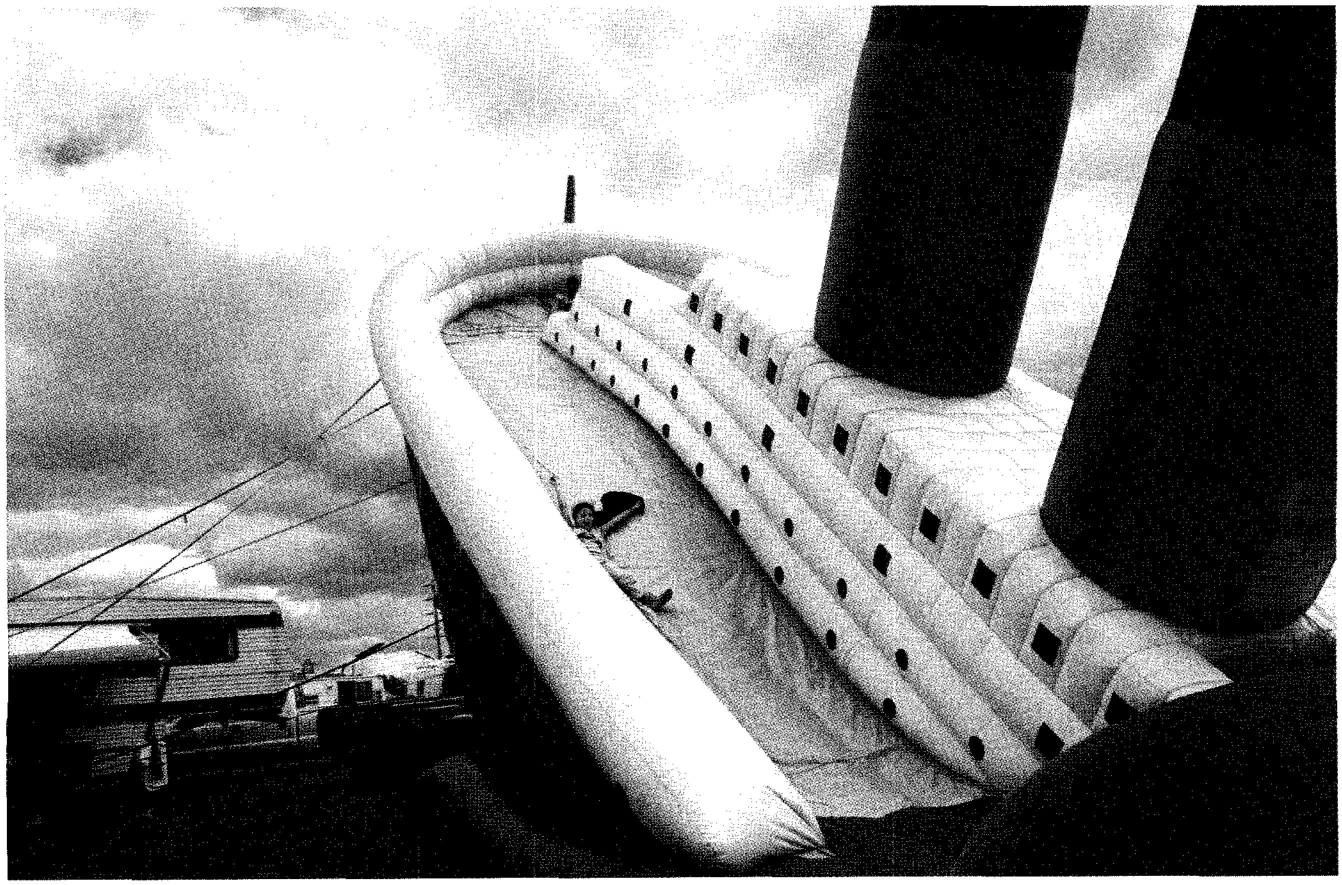
BOSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
Daniel Barenboim, conducting and performing in recital at the Met this week, is the soloist with the B.S.O. both in Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 3 in C Minor and in the New York première of Elliott Carter's mini-concerto "Interventions." Beforehand, he joins the conductor, James Levine, at the keyboard for Schubert's Fantasie in F Minor; the concert concludes with Stravinsky's "Rite of Spring." (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Dec. 11 at 8.)

JUILLIARD ORCHESTRA
James DePreist leads the superb student band in works by Enescu, Prokofiev (the Violin Concerto No. 2 in G Minor, with Erno Kallai), and John Corigliano (the Symphony No. 1, a dramatic response to the AIDS crisis, from 1990). (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Dec. 12 at 8.)

YALE PHILHARMONIA: "TURANGALÎLA-SYMPHONIE"
Elliott Carter's centenary is not the only one this month: the other is Olivier Messiaen's, which the renowned new-music maestro Reinbert de Leeuw will celebrate when he brings the Philharmonia down from New Haven to perform the composer's raucous and ecstatic masterwork from 1949. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Dec. 14 at 8:30.)

RECITALS

ELLIOTT CARTER CONCERTS
The centenary celebrations roll in, each with a world première (and with an appearance by the composer, who will discuss his works). Dec. 12 at 7:30: Carnegie Hall salutes Carter with a concert featuring such chamber-music stalwarts as the violinist Rolf



"Titanic, Philadelphia," by Zoe Strauss, in her exhibition "America: We Love Having You Here," at Silverstein.

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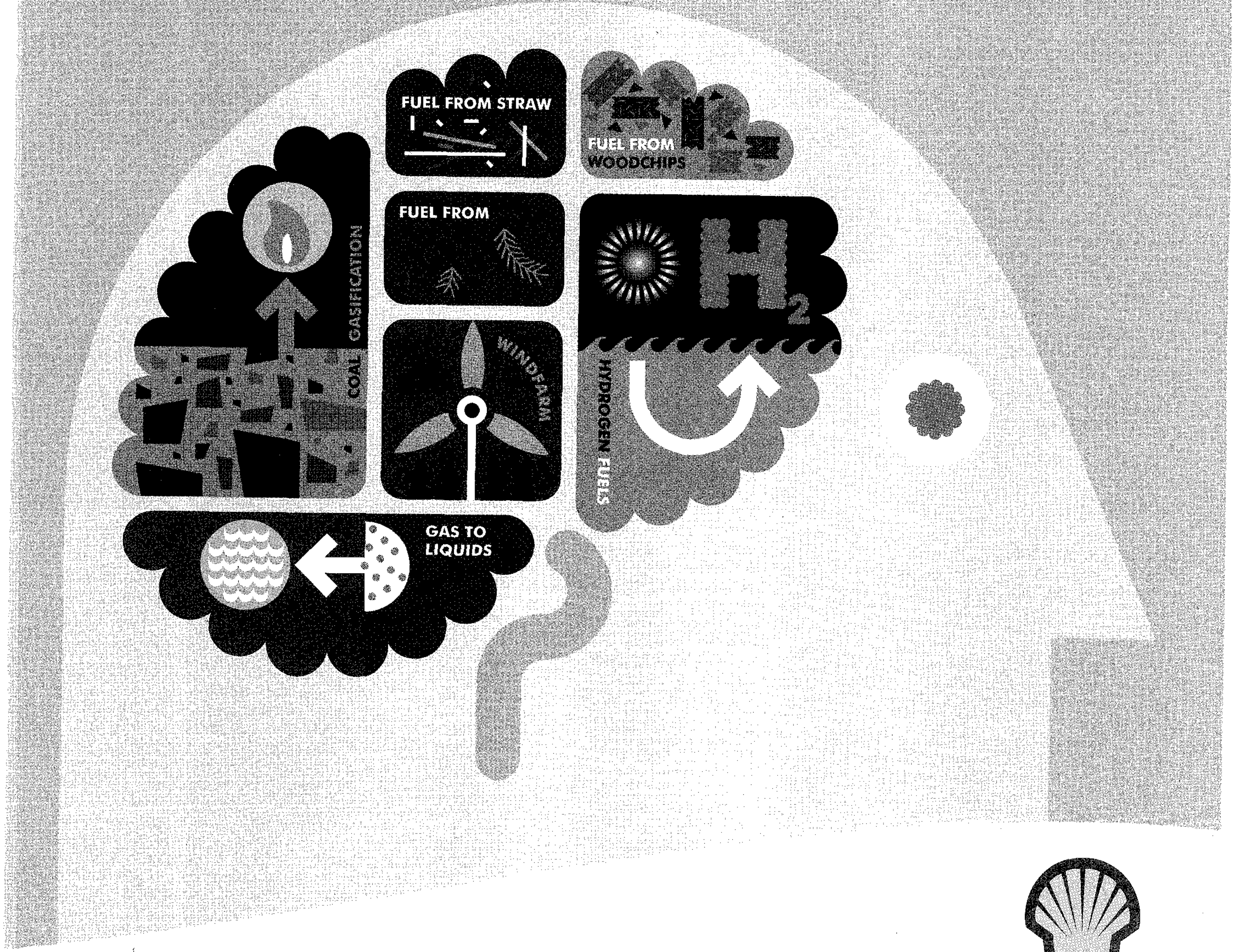


FUEL FROM STRAW
FUEL FROM WOODCHIPS
FUEL FROM
COAL GASIFICATION
WINDFARM
H_2
HYDROGEN FUELS
GAS TO LIQUIDS

Schulte, the cellist Fred Sherry, and the pianist Stephen Gosling offering the Duettino for Violin and Cello as well as "Gra," "Enchanted Preludes," and the Duo for Violin and Piano. (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800.) ♦ Dec. 13 at 2: The New York Philharmonic presents a "Day of Carter," with members of the orchestra performing "Poems of Louis Zukofsky" (with the soprano Lucy Shelton) along with the Clarinet Quintet and "Figment III." (Kaplan Penthouse, Lincoln Center. 212-875-5656.)

MUSIC AT THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Dec. 12 at 8: The young standouts selected for the Musicians from Marlboro tour (and a comparative veteran, the violinist and violist Scott St. John) perform chamber music by Mozart (the String Quintet in E-Flat Major, K. 614), Mendelssohn (the Octet), and Janáček. ♦ Dec. 13 at 8: Itzhak Perlman joins the promising students of his Perlman Music Program to offer performances of works by Mozart (including the String Quintet in D Major, K. 593) and Brahms (the Piano Quartet No. 1 in G Minor). (Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 212-570-3949.)

LEONARD BERNSTEIN: "ARIAS, BARCAROLLES, A SONATA AND RIFFS"
In a jubilant finale to Carnegie Hall's festival celebrating the larger-than-life conductor and composer, Robert Spano leads members of the Brooklyn Philharmonic (along with the mezzo-soprano Susan Graham and the pianist Jeremy Denk, among others), in a concert featuring such works as "Arias and Barcarolles" and "Prelude, Fugue, and Riffs" as well as selections from "Songfest" and "On the Town." (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800. Dec. 13 at 7:30.)

PETER SERKIN
The adventurous and indomitable pianist, long a favorite at the 92nd Street Y, partners with the Brentano String Quartet and the baritone Richard Lalli for an evening of music by Schoenberg (the stirring "Ode to Napoleon"), Wuorinen (the New York première of the Quintet No. 2 for Piano and Strings), Beethoven, and Bach. (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. Dec. 13 at 8.)

DANIEL BARENBOIM AT THE MET
In the first piano recital held at the Metropolitan Opera House since Vladimir Horowitz performed there in 1986, Barenboim will pay tribute both to the most adventurous composer of the nineteenth century, Franz Liszt, and to operas he loved in a program that features such works as "Après une Lecture de Dante" and the "Paraphrases" on music from Verdi's "Aida," "Rigoletto," and "Il Trovatore." (212-362-6000. Dec. 14 at 7.)

MOVIES OPENING

ADAM RESURRECTED
A drama, set in Israel in 1961, about Holocaust survivors who are being treated in a mental institution. Directed by Paul Schrader and starring Jeff Goldblum. Opening Dec. 12. (Quad Cinema.)

CHE
Steven Soderbergh directed this bio-pic about the revolutionary leader, starring Benicio Del Toro. Opening Dec. 5. (Ziegfeld Theatre.)

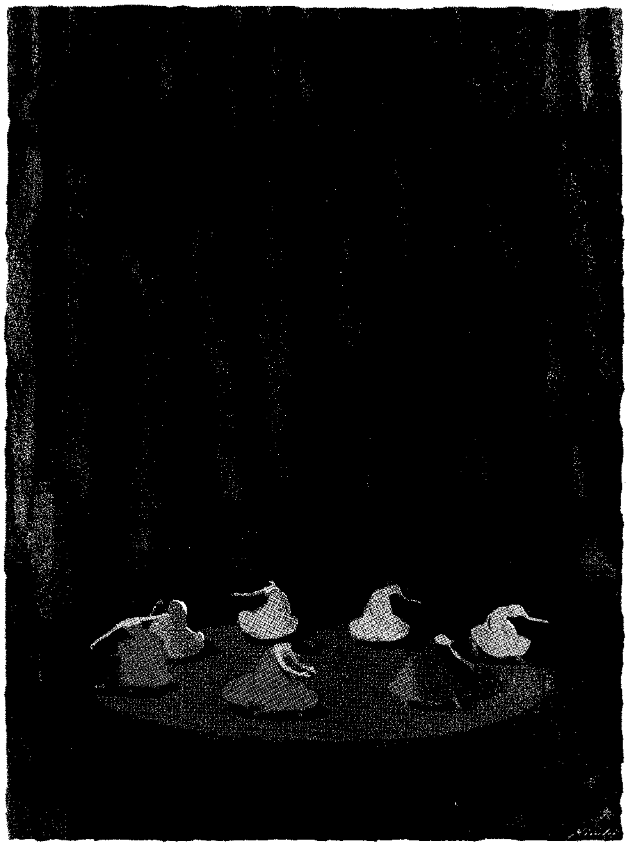
DARK STREETS
A musical drama, directed by Rachel Samuels, starring Gabriel Mann as a night-club owner who is caught in a love triangle. Opening Dec. 12. (Empire 25 and Village Theatre VII.)

THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL
Keanu Reeves stars in this remake of the science-fiction classic, about the arrival on earth of an alien. Directed by Scott Derrickson and co-starring Kathy Bates, Jennifer Connelly, and Jaden Smith. Opening Dec. 12. (In wide release.)

DOUBT
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Dec. 12. (In wide release.)

GRAN TORINO
Clint Eastwood directed and stars in this drama, about a Korean War veteran who comes to terms with his anti-Asian racism. Opening Dec. 12. (In limited release.)

IN THE CITY OF SYLVIA
In this drama, directed by José Luis Guerín, an artist hangs around the cafés of Strasbourg in search of a woman. In French. Opening Dec. 12. (Anthology Film Archives.)



Pina Bausch's ode to India, "Bamboo Blues," at BAM.

TATSURO KIUCHI

NOTHING LIKE THE HOLIDAYS
A comic drama about members of a Puerto Rican family in Chicago who face separation after the Christmas season. Directed by Alfredo De Villa and starring John Leguizamo and Vanessa Ferlito. Opening Dec. 12. (In wide release.)

THE READER
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Dec. 10. (In limited release.)

TIMECRIMES
A science-fiction thriller, directed by Nacho Vigalondo, about a man who takes part in a time-travel experiment. In Spanish. (Sunshine Cinema.)

WENDY AND LUCY
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening Dec. 10. (Film Forum.)

WHAT DOESN'T KILL YOU
Brian Goodman directed this drama, about two young men (Mark Ruffalo and Ethan Hawke) who are involved with the Mob in South Boston. Opening Dec. 12. (In limited release.)

NOW PLAYING

AUSTRALIA
Preposterous epic kitsch from Baz Luhrmann. Nicole Kidman is Sarah Ashley, a rich, high-born English lady with clipped diction and a jacket that fits as tightly as a toreador's. She arrives in Darwin in 1939 to retrieve her husband, who has been dallying with Aboriginal women on the family-owned cattle station. The brawny Hugh Jackman is a roughneck known as Drover, who drives her to the interior. Of course, he will liberate the passionate sexual woman beneath the starch, and she will tame the nihilistic free spirit into a caring and responsible man. Luhrmann, lost in the desert, rushes the camera frantically along the ground, or sends it aloft in meaningless ascents. (Once he's up there, what can he do but cut to the ground again?) He wants to create huge, throbbing set pieces, but he never establishes a standard of normal reality from which those set pieces would be an exultant release. The movie is all bitter partings and joyous reunions and nasty Japanese dive-bombers who fly in and mess up everything. With Bryan Brown, David Wenham, Jack Thompson, and, as the Aboriginal shaman who arrives whenever the plot needs a touch of magic to push it along, David Gulpilil (who co-starred in the 1971 classic "Walkabout"). Written by Stuart Beattie, Ronald Harwood, and Richard Flanagan.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 12/8/08.) (In wide release.)

BOLT
The master Pixar craftsman John Lasseter, serving as executive producer, takes the reins of Disney's latest animated project and helps create a family film that has genuine personality, humor, and warmth. It tells the story of a canine television star (voiced by John Travolta) who believes his televised superpowers are real. When he's separated from his TV co-star and owner, Penny (Miley Cyrus), he's convinced that she's been kidnapped and sets out on a cross-country adventure to rescue her. Along the way he's joined by a wisecracking cat (the great Susie Essman) and a deranged hamster (a pitch-perfect Mark Walton). Together, they give the movie moxie and keep the tone blithe and scrappy.—*Bruce Diones* (In wide release.)

CADILLAC RECORDS
Weaving together the life stories of some of America's musical legends, the director Darnell Martin chronicles the rise and fall of Chess Records, the great Chicago blues label of the fifties and sixties. Adrien Brody stars in the vague and underwritten role of the company's co-founder, Leonard Chess. His climactic scenes with Beyoncé Knowles (who plays the troubled singer Etta James) are unconvincing and overly dramatic. But, before it all unravels, the movie highlights inspired performances that bring to life the soulful—and undisciplined—ways of some of the greatest bluesmen and early rockers. With Jeffrey Wright, who is brilliantly seductive as Muddy Waters; Columbus Short, as Little Walter; Cedric the Entertainer, as the songwriter Willie Dixon; a joyous Mos Def, as Chuck Berry; and, in a small but unforgettable performance, Eamonn Walker, as Howlin' Wolf.—*B.D.* (In wide release.)

A CHRISTMAS TALE
The new film from Arnaud Desplechin, best known here for "Kings and Queen" (2004), weighs in at exactly two and a half hours, yet it barely finds time to peer beyond the battlefield of a single family. We are swiftly introduced to Abel (Jean-Paul Roussillon) and Junon (Catherine Deneuve), who live in Roubaix, France—the director's home town. Junon is suffering from cancer, and both of them suffer from their children: the endlessly grieving Elizabeth (Anne Consigny), the frankly irredeemable Henri (Mathieu Amalric), and Ivan (Melvil Poupaud), who is holding steady, despite the fact that his wife loves somebody else. In an often disorienting mixture of rages, flashbacks, speeches to the camera, and nods to other movies, the story rolls and stammers along, drawing the family into a Christmas get-together but denying them more than a glimpse of the harmony

that we might, by tradition, expect. Desplechin's film is hard, funny, and upsetting, and even at the end we feel that we are only just getting to know these people, though it could be argued that they scarcely know themselves. With Emmanuelle Devos, who laughs at the whole pack of them, and Chiara Mastroianni (Deneuve's real-life daughter). In French.—*Anthony Lane* (11/24/08) (IFC Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

EUROPA EUROPA

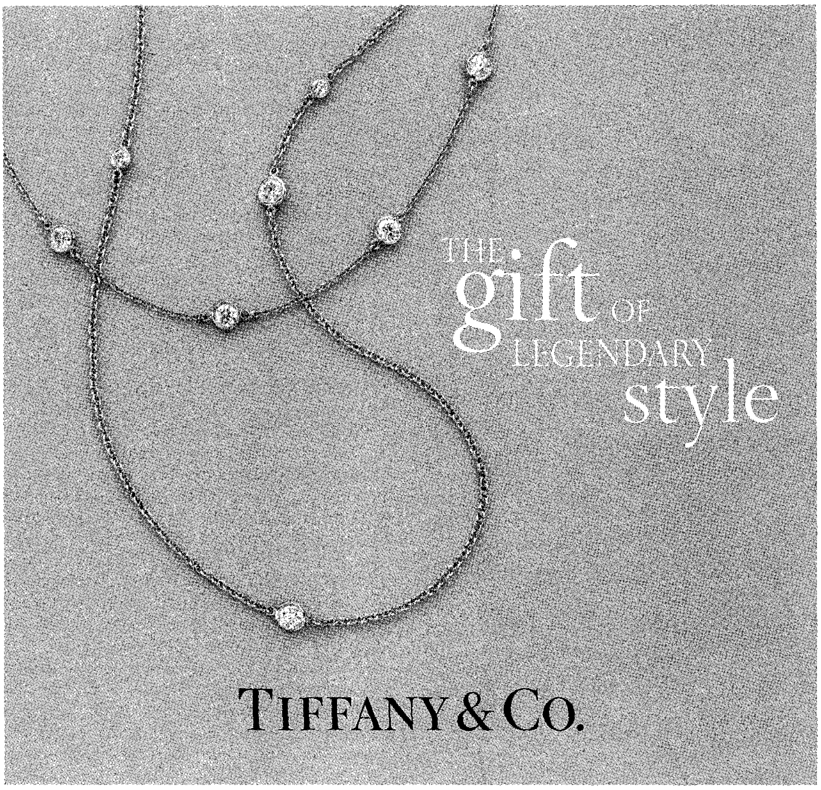
Agnieszka Holland created the only Holocaust movie that simultaneously tickles the funny bone and stings the heart. Set in Germany and Poland, it tells the factual, astonishing war story of a Jewish Everyboy named Solomon Perel, who, in order to survive, somersaults this way and that—from refugee to Bolshevik in training—and lands in the élite school for Hitler Youth. The movie begins with Solly's bris, then jumps ahead to the day of his bar Mitzvah, on the eve of the Second World War. The hero's penis is the movie's center of emotion, as well as its source of seriocomic tension and suspense—Solly must always hide his member from prying Aryan eyes. When he finds a girlfriend who's delightful except for her Nazi fanaticism (she's played by the marvellous Julie Delpy), he yearns for an intimacy that circumstance and circumcision make impossible. As he tries out different roles, Solly becomes a scary parody of a teen-ager figuring out what sort of adult he can become. Holland's handling of Marco Hofschneider in the lead role is a triumph of sympathy and tact. Together, they create a unique character—a not so candid Candide. In German, Russian, Polish, and Hebrew. Released in 1991.—*Michael Sragow* (MOMA; Dec. 12.)

THE FIREMEN'S BALL

Czech satire may have become obsolete in 1968, but, the year before the Soviet tanks rolled in, Milos Forman subtly, scathingly used the premise of a quaint provincial party to mock the Party. The pompously uniformed committee of elder firefighters and their cronies who are organizing festivities to honor a doddering retiree is nothing less than a politburo, which, in a series of sly, uproarious sketches, is revealed to be incompetent, unscrupulous, and worse. A table piled high with goodies to be raffled off—a cake, a bottle of cognac, a slab of head cheese—is stripped bare by theft, which suggests a land of deprivation and despair and also offers proof, contrary to the prevailing dogma, that what belongs to no one is everyone's prey. A beauty pageant to crown "Miss Fireman" seethes with corruption and depravity that boil over into coercion. Meanwhile, a house catches fire. In the resulting catastrophe, a touching rendition of the Lord's Prayer, at a time when daily bread was hard to come by and forgiveness was a political deviation, suggests a promise of reconciliation—with Germany as well as with Russia—that still resounds hauntingly. In Czech.—*Richard Brody* (BAM; Dec. 12-18.)

FOUR CHRISTMASES

Talented actors left to run on autopilot can't enliven this schematic seasonal romantic comedy's predictable servings of high jinks and sentiment. Vince Vaughn and Reese Witherspoon star as Brad and Kate, a fun-loving bourgeois couple from San Francisco who are resistant to marriage and other obligations. When a cancelled flight thwarts their planned holiday escape to Fiji, they get stuck doing a Christmas Day round of their divorced parents' quartet of homes. Revelations abound as, in the flat script's one clever touch, unconfessed secrets from the lovers' pasts reëmerge to suggest unsuspected fault lines in their relationship. But the tone fluctuates between forced uproar and soft soap, the stars have little chemistry, and the fine supporting cast (including Robert Duvall and Sissy Spacek, as Brad's parents, and Mary Steenburgen and Jon Voight, as Kate's) isn't given any footing to cling to. But one brief sequence of visual comedy, a pure, mechanistic slapstick number worthy of Mack Sennett, may have you laughing so hard you'll miss half of it, and Patrick Van Horn does a good turn as Brad's onetime best friend, who is now his mother's boyfriend. Directed by Seth Gordon.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)



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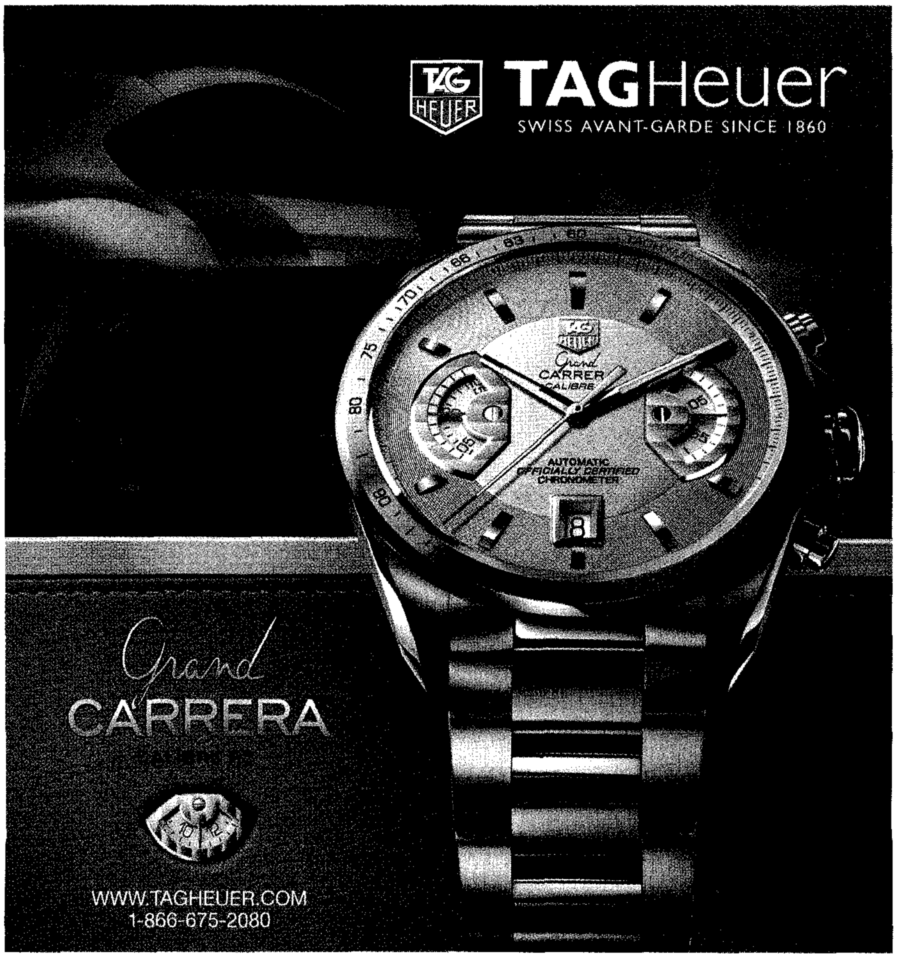

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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
LOVE AND DEATH

Sheer discomfort may play an unacknowledged role in recent resistance to the celebration of Ingmar Bergman as a great director. For the cosmopolitan, often cynical breed of critics and cinephiles, Bergman, who died last year, was too earnest, too death-obsessed, too literal-minded about the scaffolding of visual art—symbols, dream imagery, stark photographic schemes. Yet here, as a rebuke, is "Cries and Whispers," from 1972, playing Dec. 12-14 at IFC Center, a radical masterpiece of an almost punitive intensity. A wealthy, religious spinster (Harriet Andersson) is dying of cancer in a formal nineteenth-century manor house, attended, in her final agonies, by her two worldly sisters—a tense, enraged, masochistic diplomat (Ingrid Thulin) and a ripely sensual adulteress (Liv Ullmann)—as well as by a peasant maid (Kari Sylwan) who bares her flesh to comfort the dying woman, whom she loves. The movie, enclosed in tight spaces and colored in deep red, seems to take place in the veins and arteries of a long, painful dream. The women's skin is tactile, the camera erotic in its intimacy.

—*David Denby*

KIM ROSEN

FROST/NIXON
In its transfer from stage to film, Peter Morgan's account of David Frost's lengthy set of interviews with Richard Nixon in 1977, three years after he resigned the Presidency, has taken on an aura of momentousness unwarranted by the event itself. Frank Langella's performance provides considerable insights into Nixon's intelligence, caginess, and fraudulent sentimentality, and Michael Sheen makes Frost into a toothy, bright, shallow but smart showman-journalist. The interviews themselves, always absorbing, build to Nixon's climactic admission that he let the country down during the Watergate crisis. The media whirl of negotiation, advisers, preparation, and so on is engaging enough, but the episode itself changed nothing. It was a journalistic coup, not a historical milestone, and the filmmakers don't seem to realize that. Directed by Ron Howard.—*D.D.* (12/8/08) (In wide release.)

I'VE LOVED YOU SO LONG
As Juliette, Kristin Scott Thomas is first seen in closeup without makeup, her hair lustreless, her expression blank but tense. Juliette has completed a prison sentence of fifteen years for committing the unimaginable crime of murdering her six-year-old son. Her kid sister, Léa (Elsa Zylberstein), a literature professor at a university in Nancy, nervously lets her into her own family, where Juliette remains in an uneasy state of semi-silence. Written and directed by the novelist Philippe Claudel, the movie asks whether anyone who has done something so extreme can be welcomed back into the human community. And does she *want* to be welcomed back? Claudel is an observant man, he has commanded a large (and, to us, unfamiliar) cast of actors to gather around his star, and he dramatizes Juliette's slow reawakening with an infinite number of small, sharply etched details. The secrets that are finally revealed about the crime are unsatisfying—one feels a little cheated—but they have the curious effect of making one want to see the movie again in order to study Scott Thomas's performance. In French.—*D.D.* (11/10/08) (In wide release.)

MILK
Gus Van Sant's vibrantly entertaining bio-pic recreates, without starchiness, the San Francisco life of the gay activist and politician Harvey Milk (Sean Penn), who was assassinated in 1978, along with Mayor George Moscone, by a fellow-politician, the family-values conservative Dan White (Josh Brolin). The righteous march of events is warmed by the banter, the casual sex, and the candor of the gay milieu in the giddy seventies, the period just before AIDS, when life was free and easy. Much of the time, Penn keeps his voice down, but the fervor and humor are there in the most offhanded moments. Without ostentation, he creates a new body, a new temperament: he loosens his neck and shoulders and swivels his head; his smile is enormous and all-embracing; he holds an elbow out and pumps a forearm up and down like a semaphore as Harvey speaks in public. Josh Brolin, a slab of hair lying low across his forehead, gives White a brick-headed, baffled manner, a tormented neediness. In the filmmakers' interpretation, there's a suggestion that White suffered from murderously repressed homosexuality. With James Franco, Emile Hirsch, Diego Luna, and Alison Pill.—*D.D.* (12/1/08) (In limited release.)

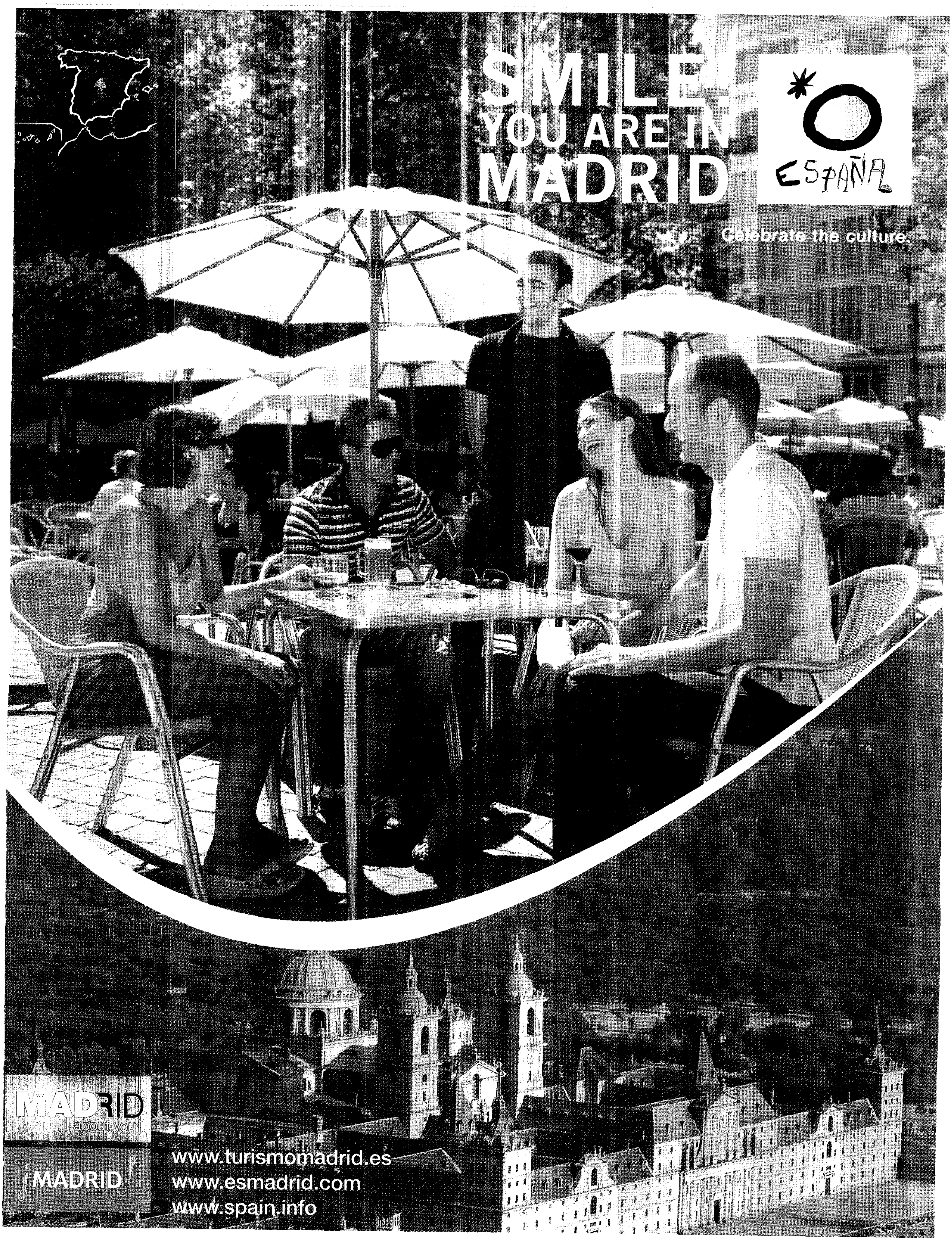
QUANTUM OF SOLACE
The twenty-second James Bond film is a strange affair. The hero is still hopping the globe in the quest to unravel a mysterious organization, as he used to do in the days of SMERSH. The difference, these days, is that none of it, not even the hopping, seems like fun. In the role of 007, Daniel Craig is brutish, joyless, and obsessive; you can't take your eyes off him, but you wonder if the punishment that he metes out is really directed at himself. He doesn't eat, he drinks to kill pain, and he manages to spend half the movie in the company of the ravishing Camille (Olga Kurylenko) without getting anywhere near a bed. His official mission is to pursue Dominic Greene (Mathieu Amalric), who is—wait for it—fast becoming a leading figure in South American water-storage circles. But the real mission, nurtured in Bond's wounded heart, is to avenge the death of Vesper Lynd, who won his love in "Casino Royale." The director, Marc Forster, whips us from one savage set piece to the next, regardless of logical connection, and the result can be read as the toughest and most expensive art-house film of the year. With Gemma Arterton, who lights up the action, all too briefly, as a fellow British spy.—*A.L.* (11/17/08) (In wide release.)

RACHEL GETTING MARRIED
The new Jonathan Demme film is one of his slighter and more oddball affairs. It stars Anne Hathaway as Kym, who leaves rehab—where she is being treated for drug addiction—to attend the wedding of her sister Rachel (Rosemarie DeWitt). This takes place at the family home in Connecticut, which has become, for the occasion, a multiethnic menagerie of liberal optimists, many bearing musical instruments. Not surprisingly, the festive air is spoiled by the intrusion of Kym, who feels constrained by her protective father (Bill Irwin) and then flashes into fearsome combat with her mother (Debra Winger). The movie is too long, and often wearying to watch, taking its visual cues from the unappeasable restlessness of the heroine. Yet the scene in which she is welcomed home, after a car accident, to be bathed and consoled by her sister without a word has a real, if exhausted, tenderness; the smarting emotions on show here are seldom contrived, and anyone versed in family conflict—that is, anyone with a family—will flinch at those moments when Demme cuts close to the bone.—*A.L.* (10/6/08) (In wide release.)

ROLE MODELS
Paul Rudd is mainly the straight man in this wan, sentimental, occasionally very funny comedy. He and Seann William Scott star as a pair of dead-end marketers shilling an energy drink to high-school students. His frustration and anger lead to a run-in with the law that gets them both sentenced to community service with a Big Brothers-like organization—and, not surprisingly, these immature adults ultimately learn to grow up by helping children in need. Most of the comedy comes from a stunning array of supporting comedians from the Judd Apatow stable (especially Christopher Mintz-Plasse, from "Superbad"), who are turned loose and allowed to riff freely, as well as from an outrageous child, Bobb'e J. Thompson, who never becomes cloying. Unfortunately, the humor repeatedly strikes the same few notes and is exhausted long before the warmhearted ending. Poor Elizabeth Banks, as a lawyer and beleaguered fiancée, once again plays a responsible mother surrogate; she and Rudd both need some hard-edged drama to expand their intelligent, lively personae. Directed by David Wain.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

SLUMDOG MILLIONAIRE
An eighteen-year-old Muslim tea-boy named Jamal (Dev Patel), born and raised in the poverty of Mumbai, teeters on the verge of fame and fortune. A nation awaits. Such is the old-fashioned, sentimental cliffhanger to which the screenwriter Simon Beaufoy and the director Danny Boyle have, with unembarrassed drive, committed themselves. Jamal is a contestant on the Indian edition of "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?," and the suspicion of the police—who, in an ill-judged prelude to the story, hold and torture him—is that he must have cheated. His response is that experience alone, whether wretched or comic, has by chance furnished him with the correct answers, and the bulk of the film, constructed from flashbacks, proves his point. The style, seen previously in "City of God" and other movies, is what you might call urban-manic: heated performances, even hotter colors, and camerawork that vies with the editing for nerve and speed. The lad at the center of it all is actually on the dull side, but the energy around him—not least in the dance sequence over the final credits—is difficult to resist.—*A.L.* (11/24/08) (In wide release.)

SYNECDOCHE, NEW YORK
The screenwriter Charlie Kaufman, who was responsible for "Adaptation," "Being John Malkovich," and other enlivening puzzles, has now directed a film of his own. Philip Seymour Hoffman plays Caden Cotard, who starts off running a small theatre company in Schenectady, and, following a sumptuous grant from the MacArthur Foundation, ends up spending decades on an altogether grander project—constructing a chunk of alternative city within New York, in which countless characters go about their scripted lives. It is an amazing conceit, but that, unfortunately, is more or less what it remains: a conceit, which, having taken half the film to get mov-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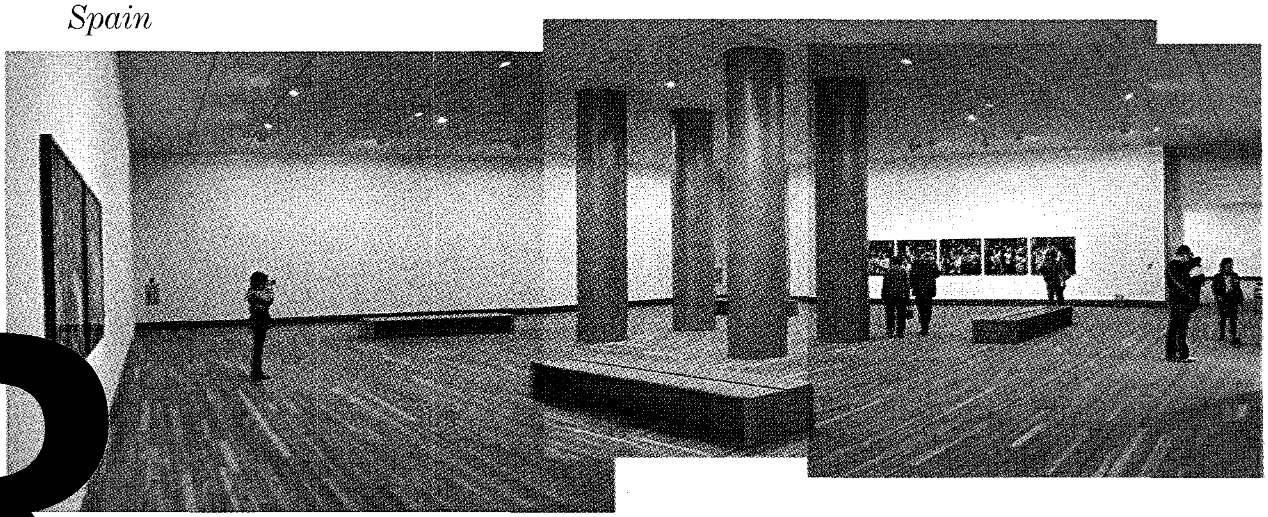
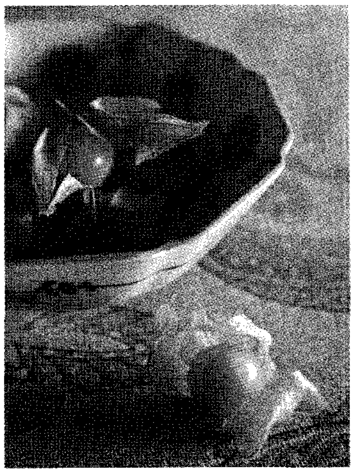


Revel in Madrid

Spain's lively, cosmopolitan capital has a well-earned reputation for offering some of Europe's best night life and cuisine. Revelers from around the world come to celebrate in style at the city's avant-garde dance clubs, intimate bars, chic restaurants, and romantic cafés.

The customary way to kick off an evening is with cocktails and tapas, small dishes of olives, cheese, sausages, and specialties that sate the appetite before notoriously nocturnal Madrileños eat dinner. Some of Madrid's most popular tapas restaurants are along Calle Cava Baja just south of the Plaza Mayor, where **Taberna Tempranillo** serves these typical treats. **El Bocaíto** in the bohemian Chueca neighborhood is another favorite destination on the *tapeo*—a multi-stop tapas feast.

After barhopping, friends meet for a leisurely dinner, often not until after 9 P.M. Choosing a restaurant may be one of the tougher decisions of the evening, but a few notable options are **La Broche**, recent winner of two Michelin stars for its creative twist on Catalan cooking, **Santceloni**, another Michelin two-star honoree specializing in fresh ingredients, and **Casa Lucio**, a city favorite for traditional Spanish cuisine.



Besides its vibrant dining scene, Madrid offers a wide range of cultural activities. The prestigious **Teatro Real** hosts concerts and operas throughout the year, and **La Plaza de Toros de Las Ventas**, Madrid's legendary bullring, is also a popular venue for rock concerts and shows.

As dinner winds down and performances end, the citywide party moves into high gear. Crowds gather at clubs around midnight, and everyone dresses up to dance until dawn—locals rarely wear jeans or sneakers to bars and clubs. The grand finale to a night on the town is the typical breakfast ritual: thick, hot chocolate and sweet, fried *churros*.

By day, Madrid has exceptional museums to explore. The **Prado Museum**, which nearly doubled its size with a new light-filled wing, is celebrating its 189th birthday. The permanent collection includes works by Fra Angelico, Tintoretto, and Hieronymous Bosch. Also in its collection, the museum has many Spanish pieces, among them, Goya's "The Third of May." On temporary exhibition until January 6th is Rembrandt: Painter of Stories, focusing on his biblical and historical references.

Also along the Paseo del Prado, the **Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum** has two of the top private collections of twentieth-century art, with works by Titian, Kandinsky, and Rothko among other highlights. The museum also recently expanded, with sixteen new galleries. Completing Madrid's "Golden Triangle of Art," the **Reina Sofia National Art Museum** specializes in contemporary art—Picasso's "Guernica" is part of the permanent collection. Day or night, visitors can revel in the treasures of this multicultural city.

TOP: NEW EXTENSION OF THE PRADO MUSEUM ©ARQTIPO
WINTER TOMATOES ©TSUKASA SHIMMYO

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ing, then grows increasingly hard to grasp as a practical enterprise, and even harder to believe in. Figures from Caden's world are represented, within his magnum opus, by hired actors: thus, his colleague Hazel (Samantha Morton), for whom he has an enduring affection, is played by Tammy (Emily Watson), and Caden himself by Sammy (Tom Noonan). As a reflection on the human eagerness to tell tales about ourselves, and to make good on our disappointments through art, Kaufman's movie has fine flashes of black humor, and there is no mistaking the tenderness in the performances of Morton, Watson, and, later on, Dianne Wiest; but the over-all result is a long slog, and the customary brightness of the writer's wit feels ever more clouded by the surrounding gloom. With Catherine Keener, as Caden's weary wife, and Hope Davis, as their counsellor.—*A.L.* (11/3/08) (In wide release.)

TRANSPORTER 3
In the third go-round of this sensibly budgeted action franchise, Jason Statham returns as the mercenary who specializes in transporting special cargo. This time he's bringing a kidnapped Ukrainian girl back to her father. It doesn't matter. Filmed throughout Eastern Europe by the rapturously named Olivier Megaton, the movie is a series of stunts—vehicular and otherwise—that are as well executed as they are drolly expected. The film's a mere diversion, but Statham is not; his lean, clean demeanor and physicality demand attention.—*B.D.* (In wide release.)

TWILIGHT
Isabella Swan (Kristen Stewart), a lovely, slender, self-possessed high-school junior, moves to a new school in rainy Washington State and sees a tall, inordinately pale boy, Edward Cullen (the square-jawed Robert Pattinson), glowering at her in despair. He wants her, but he cannot give way to desire. Edward, it turns out, is a vampire, but a very moral one, thirsty yet ascetic; he will drink only animal blood, he tells her, and she falls completely in love with him. In some ways, the scrupulous young man is an ideal lover: after all, many teen-age girls don't want intercourse; they want romance, and here is a boy with superhuman powers who is nevertheless sweet to his girl and protects her from harm without demanding anything in return but the chance to adore her. The director, Catherine Hardwicke ("Thirteen"), oversees some special effects that look a little cheesy, though the sunless Northwest, thick with mountain forests, is gloomily magnificent. Much of the time, Hardwick keeps the camera close to the chaste lovers. For teens, it's blissful madness—an abstinence fable that's sexier than sex.—*D.D.* (12/1/08) (In wide release.)

WENDY AND LUCY
A young woman named Wendy (Michelle Williams) arrives in Oregon with a car, a dog, a map, and not much else. When the car breaks down, so does her plan to get to Alaska and start her life afresh. Kelly Reichardt's serene and cautious movie tracks her heroine around town, feeling its way along the margins of society, and noting both the brush-offs and the minor acts of charity that greet a person in need. Single incidents, such as the attempt to steal a few cans of dog food, ripple outward into larger changes, and the most unglamourous spots, like the rest room at a gas station, acquire the consolation of a refuge. With her cap of black hair and bandaged ankle, Williams comes close at times to a wounded blankness, and she cracks only a couple of smiles, as if wary of more flagrant emotions; the hesitant friendship she forges with a Walgreens security guard (Walter Dalton) is the strongest bond in the film. What rescues it from tedium is the work of Sam Levy, the director of photography, who finds a formal, unhurried beauty in the storefronts and train yards of Portland, seeking out those patches of America where too many recent movies fear to tread.—*A.L.* (Film Forum.)

THE WRESTLER
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (In limited release.)

Also Playing

THE BOY IN THE STRIPED PAJAMAS: In wide release. **LET THEM CHIRP AWHILE:** Cinema Village. **MADAGASCAR: ESCAPE 2 AFRICA:** In wide release. **PUNISHER: WAR ZONE:** In wide release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—Special screenings. Dec. 10 at 8: Short-film program, including "Aurora Borealis" (2002, Bradley Eros), introduced by the director. ♦ Dec. 11 at 7:30: "The Young Prince" (2007, R. Bruce Elder), introduced by the director. ♦ Dec. 12 at 7:30: "Eye on the Sky" (2008, George Kuchar) and other short films. ♦ Dec. 13 at 8: Short animated films by Jeff Scher. ♦ "Essential Cinema." Dec. 13 at 6: Films by Robert Breer, including "Pat's Birthday" (1962). ♦ Dec. 14 at 6: Films by James Broughton, including "Dreamwood" (1972). ♦ Dec. 14 at 8: Films by Broughton, including "The Pleasure Garden" (1953).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—A tribute to Paul Newman. Dec. 11 at 6 and 9: "The Hustler" (1961, Robert Rossen). ♦ Dec. 12-14 at 2, 3:45, 5:30, 7:30, and 9:30 and Dec. 15-18 at 4:30, 6, 7:45, and 9:30: "The Firemen's Ball" (†).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—In revival. Dec. 10-16 at 2, 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "Amarcord" (1973, Federico Fellini; in Italian and Greek).

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE
Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—"Refracted Light: The Films of Quinto and Jean-Gabriel Albicocco." Dec. 16 at 12:30, 4, and 7: "O Saisons, O Châteaux" (1958, Agnès Varda; in French) and "He Who Must Die" (1957, Jules Dassin; in French).

IFC CENTER
323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—"Stranger Than Fiction," a documentary series. Dec. 10 at 8: "Pressure Cooker" (2008, Mark Becker and Jennifer Grausman), followed by a Q. & A. with the directors. ♦ The films of Ingmar Bergman. Dec. 12-14 at 11 A.M.: "Cries and Whispers" (1972; in Swedish).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"The Contenders." Dec. 10 at 4:30: "A Girl Cut in Two" (2007, Claude Chabrol; in French). ♦ Dec. 13 at 6:30: "I Want to See" (2008, Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige; in French, Arabic, and English). ♦ Through Jan. 5: The films of Agnieszka Holland. Dec. 10 and Dec. 13 at 7: "Copying Beethoven" (2006). ♦ Dec. 11 at 6 and Dec. 13 at 1: "To Kill a Priest" (1988). ♦ Dec. 11 at 8:30 and Dec. 13 at 4: "The Third Miracle" (1999). ♦ Dec. 12 at 6: "Without Anesthesia" (1977, Andrzej Wajda; in Polish). ♦ Dec. 12 at 8:30: "Europa Europa" (†). ♦ Dec. 14 at 2: "Julie Walking Home (the Healer)" (2002; in English, Russian, and Polish). ♦ Dec. 14 at 5: "A Girl Like Me: The Gwen Araujo Story" (2006). ♦ Dec. 15 at 6: "Evening with Abdon" (1975; in Polish). ♦ Dec. 15 at 8:15: "Sunday Children" (1976; in Polish). ♦ The films of Ferzan Ozpetek. Except where noted, all films are in Italian. Dec. 12 at 4:30: "Sacred Heart" (2005). ♦ Dec. 12 at 9: "His Secret Life" (2001; in Italian and Turkish). ♦ Dec. 13 at 4: "A Perfect Day" (2008). ♦ Dec. 14 at 1: "Facing Windows" (2003). ♦ Dec. 14 at 3: "The Turkish Bath" (1997; in Turkish and Italian). ♦ "ContemporAsian." Dec. 11 at 8, Dec. 12 at 6:30, Dec. 13 at 2, Dec. 14 at 5, and Dec. 15 at 4:30: "Herbert" (2006, Suman Mukhopadhyay; in Bengali).

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART
150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000)—"Cabaret Cinema." Dec. 12 at 9:30: "In the Mood for Love" (2002, Wong Kar-wai; in Cantonese, Shanghainese, and French).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (212-875-5610)—"Spanish Cinema Now." All films are in Spanish. Dec. 11 at 9:15 and Dec. 14 at 2: "Crazy" (2008, Juan Luis Iborra). ♦ Dec. 12 at 1 and Dec. 13 at 7:30: "Casual Day" (2008, Max Lemcke). ♦ Dec. 12 at 3 and Dec. 14 at 6:10: "Blind Sunflowers" (2008, José Luis Cuerda). ♦ Dec. 13 at 1:30: "The Sixth Sense" (1929, Nemesio M. Sobrevila and Eusebio Fernández Ardavín). ♦ Dec. 13 at 3:15: "Everyone's Invited" (2008, Manuel Gutiérrez Aragón). ♦ Dec. 13

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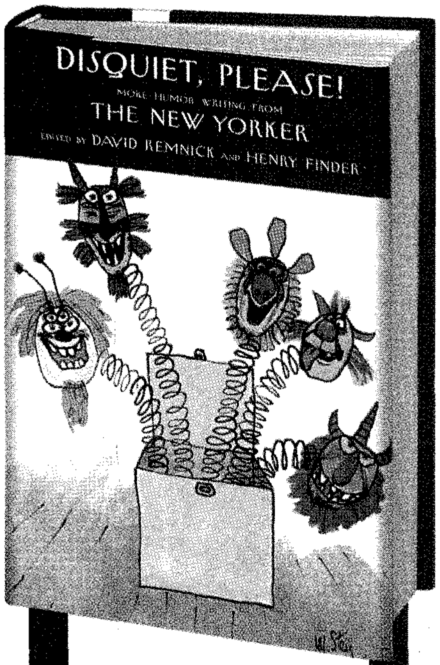

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at 5:30: "Rated-R" (2008, Dunia Ayaso and Félix Sabroso). ♦ Dec. 13 at 9:30: "[REC]" (2007, Jaume Balagueró and Paco Plaza). ♦ Dec. 14 at 8:15: "My Father's House" (2008, Gorka Merchán). ♦ Special screenings. Dec. 12 at 7 and 9: "The Sky Crawlers" (2008, Mamoru Oshii).

READINGS AND TALKS

"THALIA BOOK CLUB"
The novelist Rick Moody talks with Tom Wolfe about his seminal account of sixties counterculture, "The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test." The actor René Auberjonois will perform an excerpt from the book. (Thalia Theatre, Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. Dec. 10 at 7:30.)

CORNELIA STREET CAFÉ
The actors Michael Cumpsty, Michael Stuhlbarg, and Paul Hecht join the lutist Daniel Swenberg and the writer Robin Hirsch for a celebration of Milton's four-hundredth birthday. (29 Cornelia St. Tickets at the door. Dec. 11 at 6.)

AMERICAN FOLK ART MUSEUM
Harry Cooper, the curator of modern and contemporary art at the National Gallery of Art, talks about the nineteenth-century portraitist Ammi Phillips and the abstract painter Mark Rothko. Work by both artists is currently on view at the museum. (45 W. 53rd St. 212-265-1040. Dec. 11 at 6.)

NEW SCHOOL
Jonathan Franzen, Sarah Vowell, and Parker Posey offer a staged reading of Franzen's contribution, a play about New York State, to the new anthology "State by State: A Panoramic Portrait of America." (66 W. 12th St. 212-229-5488. Dec. 12 at 7.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

"PURE COUNTRY"
From 1961 to 1971, Leon Kagarise, an audiophile from Baltimore with a passion for country music, snapped photographs of Johnny Cash, George Jones, the Louvin Brothers, Bill Monroe, Dolly Parton, and just about every other artist who played the small outdoor concert stages near his home. Kagarise, who died earlier this year, left behind a massive pile of color slides, many of which have been collected in the attractive new coffee-table book "Pure Country." On Dec. 10 at 7:30, the music journalist Eddie Dean, who wrote the introduction to the volume, joins the legendary banjo picker Roni Stoneman and others in celebrating its publication. (The Bell House, 149 7th St., between Second and Third Aves., Brooklyn. 718-643-6510.)

NEW YORK NATIONAL BOAT SHOW
This year's annual escapist display of fibreglass gets under way on Dec. 13. (Jacob K. Javits Convention Center, Eleventh Ave. between 34th and 39th Sts. For more information, call 212-984-7007. Through Dec. 21.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES
A second-century marble statue of a well-proportioned man, bearded and wavy-haired, with large hands and a prominent nose—the Emperor Hadrian, to the life—gazes out from the past at **Christie's** antiquities auction (Dec. 9). Less noble, perhaps, but gorgeous nonetheless is the jewelry offered in a companion sale the same day, including a pair of gold earrings from the second century B.C., on which a panther stands with one paw resting on a blood-red garnet. (A more traditional jewelry sale follows on Dec. 11.) Twentieth-century design is the focus of three sales on Dec. 15-16, beginning with a private collection notable for its extensive Art Deco holdings. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ Intricate Byzantine animal mosaics, Syrian reliefs, and regal Egyptian figures are a few of the treasures for sale at **Sotheby's** auction of antiquities (Dec. 10), which also includes a marble portrait of Hadrian's great love, the youth Antinous. The house's sale of books and manuscripts (Dec. 11) brings together such historical documents as a letter in the hand of Benjamin Franklin in which he assesses the "delicate and critical Situation of Affairs between Britain and her Colonies," as well as a beautiful collection of nineteenth-century flower engravings. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) ♦ **Swann** holds an auction of photographs and photography books (Dec. 11) at which it will offer a fifty-issue set of the extravagantly designed fashion-and-art publication *Visionaire*, among other attractions. (104 E. 25th St. 212-254-4710.) ♦ At its Dec. 10 sale of books and manuscripts, **Bloomsbury** will be selling a recently discovered manuscript of the earliest known version of Edgar Allan Poe's poem "The Sleeper" (or "Lady Irene," as it was originally called), inscribed by the poet in the keepsake book of a Southern belle. (6 W. 48th St. 212-719-1000.)

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"Antony and Cleopatra," at Carnegie Hall.

PUNY

ON THE HORIZON

MOVIES
MY FAVORITE MARTIN
Dec. 26-31

Red for blood, green for money, white for heat: Martin Scorsese's vision of the Italian-American experience is ready-made for the holiday season. Walter Reade offers a week of Scorsese's mercurial classics, including "Taxi Driver," "Raging Bull," "The King of Comedy," and "Casino," as well as such documentaries as "No Direction Home," about Bob Dylan, and the rarely screened "American Boy: A Profile of Steven Prince." (212-875-5610.)

THE THEATRE
HEDDA CASE
Jan. 6

Mary-Louise Parker—taking a break from "Weeds"—plays the iconic leading lady in Ibsen's drama "Hedda Gabler," in a Roundabout Theatre Company production at the American Airlines Theatre. (212-719-1300.)

NIGHT LIFE
SEVEN-YEAR ITCH
Jan. 8

The Afro-beat inheritor Femi Kuti, the son of the genre innovator Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, recently released "Day by Day," his first studio album in seven years. His U.S. tour includes a headlining stop at Webster Hall. (212-307-7171.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
HERO'S WELCOME
Jan. 15-16

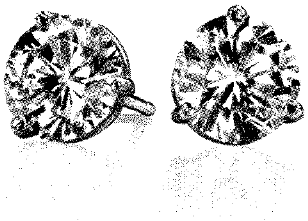
With the startling departure of Gerard Mortier, who was to be New York City Opera's new director, the company needs continuity more than ever. It proceeds with the main offering of its truncated season, two concert performances of Barber's "Antony and Cleopatra," at Carnegie Hall. (212-247-7800.)

ART
LUSH LIFE
Jan. 27-April 19

The most banal details blossomed under the gaze of the French painter Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947). Take this journal entry: "Weather bright but cold; there is vermillion in the orange shadows and violet in the gray ones." Seventy-five paintings, drawings, and watercolors, made between 1923 and 1947, will be on view in "Pierre Bonnard: The Late Interiors," at the Met. (212-535-7710.)

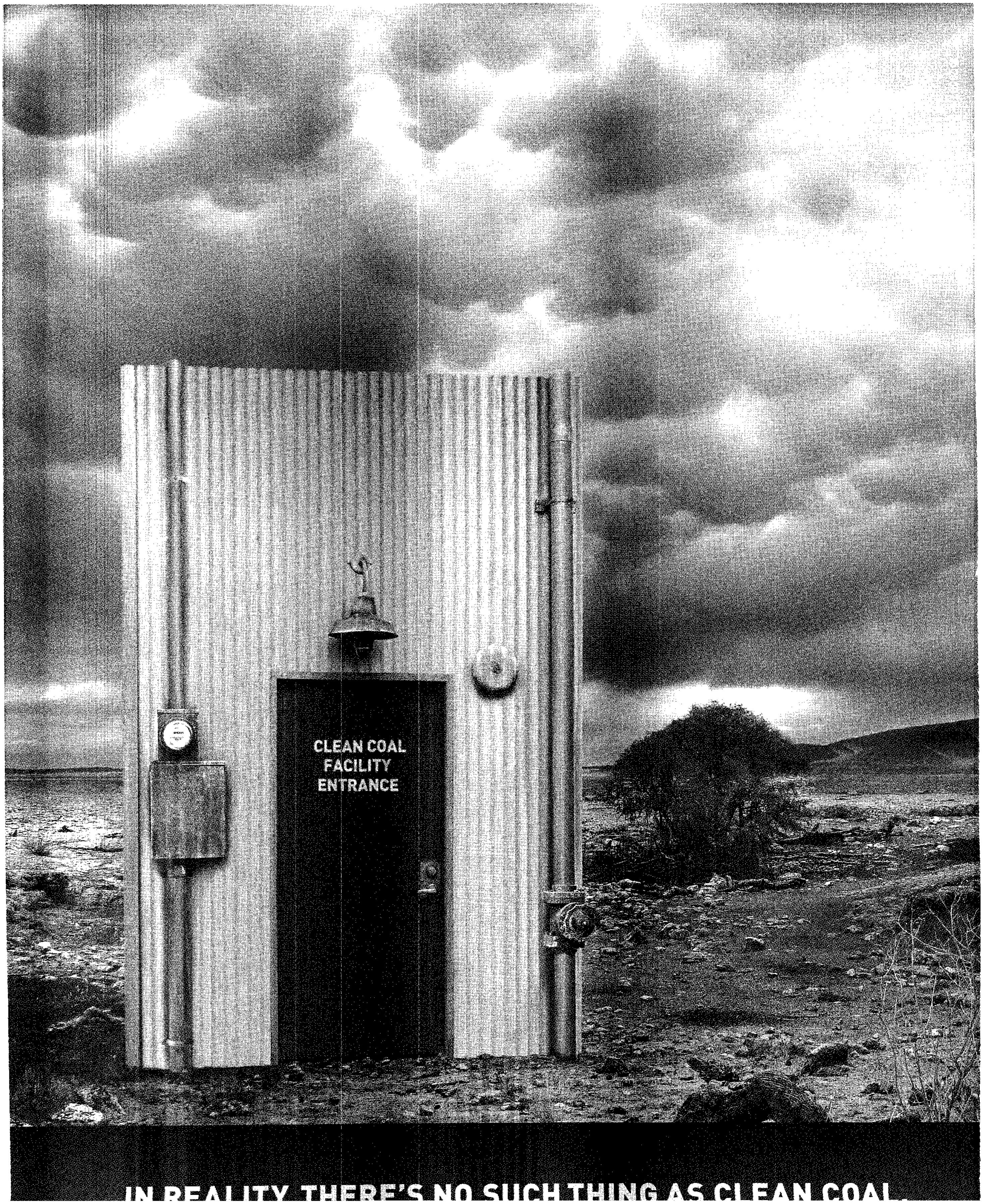
IS LOVE THE ONLY CONSTANT IN AN EVER-CHANGING WORLD?

Almost.



A DIAMOND IS FOREVER

THE DE BEERS FAMILY OF COMPANIES


CLEAN COAL
FACILITY
ENTRANCE
IN REALITY, THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS CLEAN COAL.

THE
NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

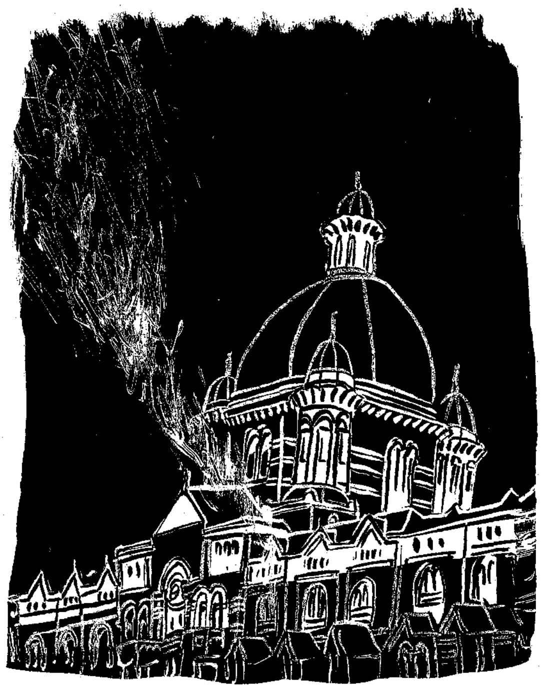
COMMENT
RISK FACTORS

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

A few days after well-armed men mowed down scores of helpless people in Mumbai, an American commission released a report on terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. "World at Risk" is one of those conscientious, bipartisan efforts, its importance signalled by publication as a trade paperback, whose sober findings and pragmatic recommendations momentarily give you the sense that every problem—even one as alarming as the likelihood that "a weapon of mass destruction will be used in a terrorist attack somewhere in the world by the end of 2013"—has a common-sense solution. The report includes chapters on biological and nuclear risks, and one titled "Pakistan," which would seem to suggest that the nation itself is a kind of W.M.D.

According to intelligence reports, the attacks in Mumbai were carried out by terrorists who had received extensive training from the Pakistan-based group Lashkar-e-Taiba, or Army of the Pure. Its agenda has been to force India to give up control over the disputed northern mountain region of Jammu and Kashmir. More recently, the group's leader, Hafiz Saeed, spoke of creating a Muslim south Asia—thus, the band that carried out the killings called itself the Hyderabad Deccan Mujahideen, implying a holy war extending down to the south-central Indian region that, in the late eighteenth century, marked the farthest limit of the Mughal empire.

The name has the ring of nostalgic grandeur common among jihadist groups elsewhere, with their historical claims on far-flung places like Al Andalus, also known as Spain. And the designated targets in Mumbai suggested an ambition on the terrorists' part extending well beyond the local troubles of Kashmir: hotels, a café, a hospital, a train station; foreign visitors, well-heeled Indians, Jews. The terrorists tortured their Jewish victims. They demanded to know the caste and home state of Indians. They held conference calls with their superiors in Lahore and Karachi to determine whether or not a certain hostage should be killed. When the goal is a Muslim south Asia, the answer is almost always yes.



The operation was so skillful and deadly, complete with a maritime landing by inflatable craft, that one security expert said that Navy SEALs would have had a hard time pulling it off. The sophisticated tactics, as well as electronic evidence, point to the involvement of top Lashkar figures, and also, according to Indian sources, of current or former officers of Pakistan's intelligence and military. So the murders have led to a familiar volley of accusations, denials, counter-accusations, and threats between the nuclear-armed governments of India and Pakistan. They have also inspired a degree of restraint on India's part and pledges of coöperation on Pakistan's that are less familiar and more encouraging.

In one sense, the most appropriate response—articulated by commentators and ordinary people after the terror was over—is to express solidarity with the victims, and also with the idea of Mumbai, which, like the idea of New York, represents a vision of society that is the opposite of the vision behind names like Lashkar-e-Taiba and Hyderabad Deccan Mujahideen: impure, secular, modern, open. But moral revulsion doesn't suggest an intelligent course of action. The attacks in

Mumbai reveal the vexing complexity of the interconnected conflicts throughout south Asia. At the urging of the United States, Pakistan had moved six divisions from its eastern frontier with Indian Kashmir to fight militants on its western border with Afghanistan; now the terrorists have succeeded in inducing Pakistan to threaten to cut back its pressure on the tribal areas and redeploy its troops to the east. Islamist radicalism is the main spark that keeps inflaming these conflicts.

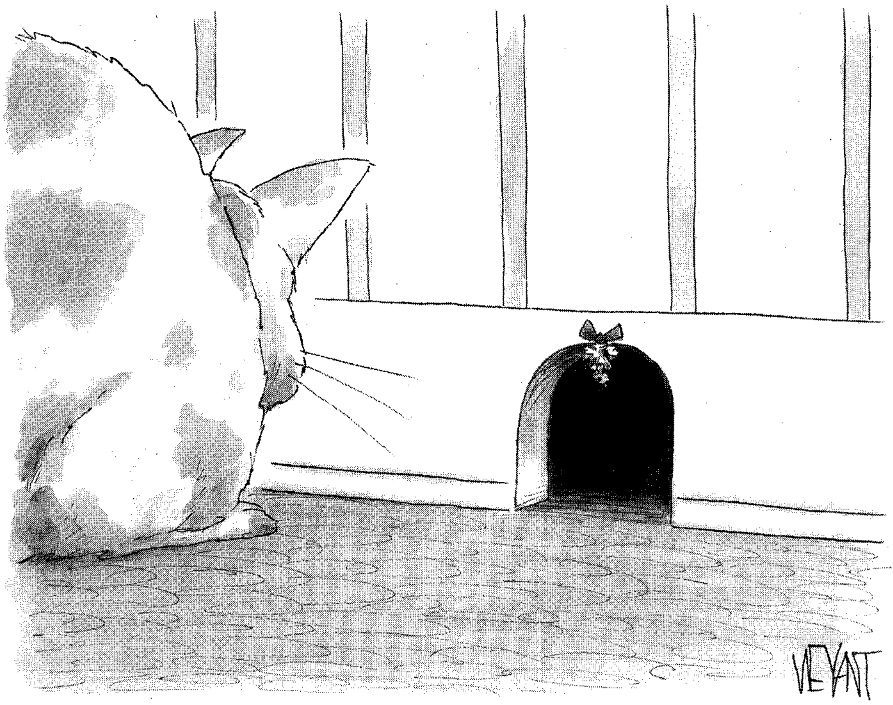
Some commentators have simply demanded that Pakistan rid itself of the virus of extremism that threatens its own security as well as its neighbors'. But which Pakistan is *going to do it*? The weak civilian government of President Asif Zardari? The two-faced security services? The tribal leaders along the Afghanistan border? The huge, overwhelmingly poor, tumultuous population? The core problem is that Pakistan is no longer really a country, if it ever was. "Our Pakistan strategy is hopelessly at odds with reality," David Kilcullen, a former counterinsurgency adviser to the State Department, said. "We treat it as an earnest but incapable ally in the war on terrorism." In fact, some civilian elements of the government are American allies; some military elements are American enemies. The wild northwest, where Islamist militants have extended their control and created a safe haven for Al Qaeda, has thwarted those who would govern it for a long time. Lord Curzon, the British viceroy of India at the turn of the last century, fumed, "No patchwork scheme—and all our present recent schemes . . . are mere patchwork—will settle the Waziristan problem. Not until the military steam-roller has passed over the country from end to end, will there be peace. But I do not want to be the person to start that machine."

American policymakers must be tempted to agree. Years of U.S. efforts in Pakistan—military aid, air strikes, Special Forces operations, bilateral diplomacy, coaxings, warnings—have been patchwork, and they have failed. Different approaches, including ones suggested in "World at Risk," such as putting more effort into development and governance in Pakistan's northwest, or bringing other regional countries to the table, offer some promise. But, in Kilcullen's words, "Iraq might be easier than this. It's a very, very difficult problem, and we don't have much leverage in it."

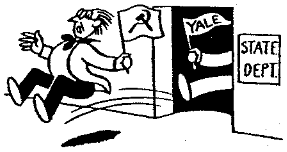
In the days after the Mumbai attacks, the Washington *Post* reported that the Obama transition team was considering Richard Holbrooke as a special envoy to the region. The position would create a kind of civilian counterpart to General David Petraeus, the head of Central Command, filling a diplomatic void in U.S. foreign policy that the military has occupied throughout the Bush years. The Administration has always regarded terrorism in the narrow terms of war, and this myopia led it to deal with the region's countries in isolation from one another, so that the policy in Kabul sometimes contradicted the one in Islamabad, which in turn was undermined by the growing partnership with New Delhi, and all of them were hampered by the refusal to talk to Tehran, whose role in the affairs of its neighbors to the east receives little attention. A special envoy would have to see the problem whole.

Holbrooke is the most experienced diplomat in the Democratic Party, and the aggressive negotiating skill he showed in brokering the Dayton accords that ended the war in Bosnia is badly needed in south Asia. But a legacy of the Bush Administration is that America can no longer sweep in and impose a solution on a crisis. The answers for Pakistan lie largely in its own hands—that's the most frightening thing of all.

—*George Packer*



DEPT. OF EDUCATION
TEAM OF BRAINIACS

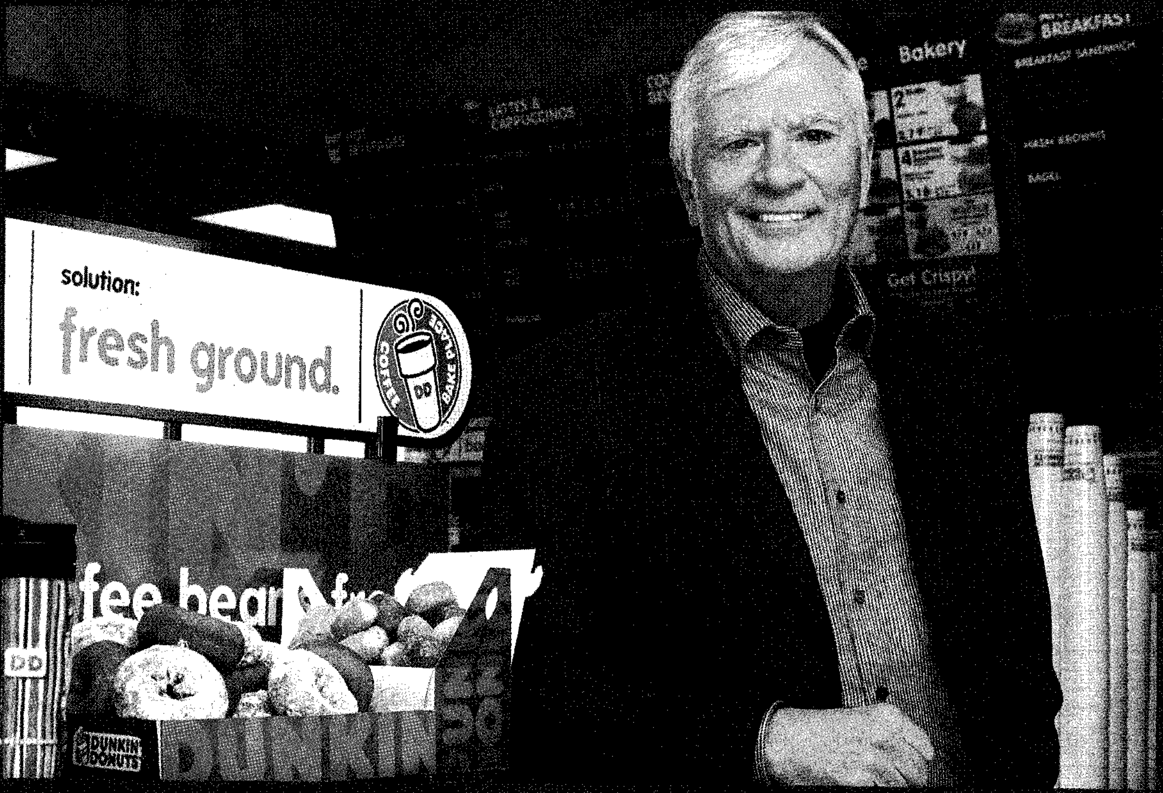


Last week wasn't such a boola one for the Ivy League: on Thursday, one of the cheerier items the *Harvard Crimson* could muster, as the university's administration announced that its endowment had lost nearly a quarter of its value, was that Shelby MacLeod, a freshman fencer, had gone undefeated in the Beanpot Championship in spite of a hamstring problem. In a *Times* column titled "A Team of Whizzes," Bob Herbert wondered whether the Obama Administration, "brilliant as it appears to be," would pursue an élitist agenda; meanwhile, recordings resurfaced of Richard Nixon (Whittier '34, Duke Law '37) excoriating Henry Kissinger (Harvard B.A. '50, M.A. '52, Ph.D. '54):

> NIXON: The Ivy League Presidents? Why, I won't let those sons-of-bitches ever in this White House again. Never, never. None of them. They're finished. The Ivy League schools are finished. . . . Henry, I would not have had them in. Don't do that again. . . . They came out against us when it was tough. . . . Don't ever go to an Ivy League school again, ever. Never, never, never.

David Skorton, the president of Cornell, was apprised of Nixon's comments over the phone. "My mouth is open," Skor-

CAPITAL IDEAS AND EXPERIENCE. DELICIOUS RESULTS.



JON L. LUTHER, CHAIRMAN and CEO OF DUNKIN' BRANDS, put a wealth of food-service experience on the table for Dunkin' Donuts, and it's paid off. Says Luther, "I joined with a game plan. The lessons I'd learned made me more courageous and smarter about how to run a business. Dunkin' Donuts was a wonderful coffee chain disguised as a donut shop. We shifted the brand emphasis and the perception of who we were."

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ton said, after the line went quiet. "Gosh, what a negative thing to say. Ivy League schools, like all good universities, teach people to think and to reason, and why would anyone be against that?" Amy Gutmann, the president of Penn, noted that suspicion of Ivy League intellectuals is "a recurring undercurrent" in American politics: "The story I remember is from 1976, when the New York senator James Buckley referred to Daniel Patrick Moynihan as 'Professor Moynihan,' and Moynihan replied, 'The mudslinging has begun.' " So, whizzes or sons of bitches? A self-appointed statistician (an Ivy League English major) was moved to perform a quasi-scientific analysis of the educational makeups of Presidential Cabinets since Nixon.

The perception that Obama's Cabinet is unusually tweedy is, at least so far, correct: of the fifteen degrees that he and his nominees hold, forty per cent are from the Ivy League, among the highest proportions in the sample. (Count the other high-ranking team members James L. Jones, Susan Rice, Lawrence Summers, and Peter Orszag and the percentage dips to 30.7, but only because Rice, a Stanford alum, holds two advanced degrees from Oxford, and Orszag, a Princeton graduate, also holds two degrees from the London School of Economics. This diversification is more or less cancelled out by the fact that Summers, until he insinuated that women are dunces at science, was the president of Harvard.) Obama, of course, is a graduate of Harvard Law and of Columbia, whose fight song "Stand Up & Cheer"—"Our boys are fighting, / For they are bound to win the fray; / We've got the team. We've got the steam"—sounds better suited to George W. Bush's defense policy, but whose motto, "*In lumine Tuo videbimus lumen*," is basically Latin for "We are the change we've been waiting for."

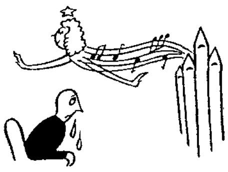
Obama's choice of Timothy Geithner for Treasury Secretary reflects collegiate continuity. "I don't know if I want to claim this as a Dartmouth chair, but I think we're very, very proud of the two of them," James Wright, the university's president, said, pointing out that Henry Paulson is also a Hanover alum. With the exception of those headed by Bushes, though, Republican Administrations have been slightly more intellectual, or—depending on how you feel about squash and a cappella—slightly more élitist. Of the degrees held by the Clinton and Carter Cabinets, 22.6% and 33.3%, respectively, are from the Ivy League. Nixon (36.2%), Ford (48.8%), and Reagan (35.6%) all scored higher, thanks, in part, to what might be called the Kissinger effect. In keeping with his anti-egghead rhetoric, George H. W. Bush—who once, despite having been a Skull and Bonesman at Yale, accused Michael Dukakis of having hatched his foreign policy in "Harvard Yard's boutique"—posted a score of 23.1%. George W. Bush's Cabinet (26.2%), a Western-skewing bunch, held more degrees from the University of Denver (five) than from Yale (two, plus Bush's one), and included the lone Cabinet member to have attended the Monterrey Institute of Technology, in Querétaro, Mexico.

Real-world experience, the Ivy League presidents were at pains to assert, can be as important as credentials. "I would say that brains are back in style, with the premium on pragmatism and governing from the middle," Gutmann said. Skorton said that book-learning and common sense "are not mutually exclusive." (Nor are a state-school education and a sense of exclusivity: Reagan's Secretary of the Interior James Watt, a University of Wyoming man, resigned after boasting, of a commission within his department, "I have a black, a woman, two Jews, and a cripple.") Reached in her office at Whittier, Sharon Herzberger, the college's president, said that "the enormous focus in the media on a few élite institutions" was misplaced. "I don't know whether you know this, but Richard Nixon hoped to go to an Ivy League school himself, and he did not have the money to do so," she said. "Originally, he wanted to get away from Whittier, go East to one of those high-falutin Ivy League schools. In the end, he appreciated the education he got."

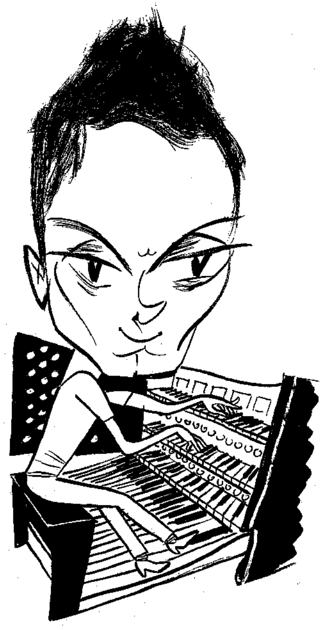
—*Lauren Collins*

DEPT. OF PRODIGIES

PIPES



It is possible that some New Yorkers remain unaware that July, 2008, marked the beginning of the International Year of the Organ, the King of Instruments no longer exercising quite the royal prerogative it once did. Not so at Middle Collegiate Church, in the East Village, which has invested five hundred thousand dollars in a new digital organ, designed by Cameron Carpenter, who since spring has been Middle Church's artist in residence. "This is by far the most adventurous, and daring, and flamboyant organ in the city," Carpenter explained the other Sunday, in the sanctuary. Such words might equally be applied to Carpenter, whose playing is unusually athletic (when off duty, he figure-skates), whose non-clerical performance wardrobe includes a clingy white T-shirt decked with Swarovski crystals, and who has an alternative identity as a gold-skinned, dance-mad club kid. "The alter ego Shane Turquoise is one that would ring some bells that the name Cameron Carpenter would not," he explained, raising a professionally tweezed eyebrow as he sprawled in a pew.



Cameron Carpenter

For those whose bells remain unstruck even by the name Cameron Carpenter, a quick résumé: Carpenter, who is twenty-seven, is a graduate of Juilliard and a native of rural Pennsylvania, where his father is an engineer who builds industrial furnaces. Homeschooled until the fifth grade—"I was really delicate as a child, emotionally and psychologically, and my mom was loath to subject me to kids"—Carpenter began playing the organ at the age of four, after being inspired by a photograph of an organist mid-chord. At eleven, he became a chorister at the American Boychoir School. (He wasn't, and still isn't, religious.) "Even as the bus pulled up to the church where we were to perform, I became almost transfixed with this sense of approaching ecstasy," he recalled, his sentences seemingly honed for an as-yet-unwritten autobiography. "It was not even at the knowledge that there was a great organ. There was no poor organ or great organ to me; there was just the organ. I would be filled with this sense of wonder, just to experience the most humble pipe organ."

The enforced humility of the church organist—who is often hidden at the back of the church, obscured by a forest of pipes—is anathema to Carpenter, who last week was nominated for a Grammy Award and who rejects comparisons with the most celebrated organist of the twentieth century, Virgil Fox, by saying, "I have no interest in being the next Virgil Fox. I am the first Cameron Carpenter." He added, "So much of organ playing is dependent on adjusting to the organ—which is to say, whatever happens to be broken you can't use; whatever has a missing note because a mouse fell on it you can't use. Suddenly, all those issues are trampling all over your artistic concept. This is not something that is thought of even for a second in the piano world. If Kissin sat down to a Steinway and there was a string missing, do you think he would play the concert?" Carpenter is equally dismissive of the tendency, among what he refers to as "the organ community," to venerate the instrument at the expense of the performer. "Every artist wants his due," he said. "You don't go to hear Van Halen's guitar, or Lang Lang's piano."

Hence Carpenter's attachment to the new organ at Middle Church, which is not only rodent-free but has been endowed with a range exceeding that of any traditional pipe organ. On it, Carpenter can play not only Bach and Messiaen but also improvisational jazz. (He'll be demonstrating in concert on December 21st. Claim a front pew to observe his sartorial signature, a pair of white shoes with two-inch Cuban heels and leather soft enough to reveal the outlines of his long, articulate toes at work on the pedals.) Carpenter hopes to attain a degree of notoriety sufficient to obtain his own organ with which he might tour, rather than being obliged to play on unfamiliar instruments. "Now that I am old, and I have become somewhat jaded, I want a relationship that is not a one-night stand," he said. "I crave the relationship that the most meagre violinist has with his instrument."

He says that "the jury is still out" on whether performing as an organist is his life's work. "I have a troubled relationship with performing," he said, fiddling with the knot of his purple velvet tie and unbuttoning his embroidered vest. "When people talk about Glenn Gould—I feel I really understand what he did, and why he did it, retiring from performing. Except, if you think pianos have a ratio and a spectrum from instrument to instrument you should try playing the organ night after night."

—*Rebecca Mead*

HOME AGAIN

BEEFSTEAK

At a banquet in Paterson, New Jersey, last week, a slide show ran quietly in the background as the guests—most of them men, thick-necked, and wearing their hair shaved, slicked, or buzzed—picked at their antipasto and penne. The slides showed the evening's honoree as a small boy, in black-and-white, and then as a grownup in candid and posed shots with Mikhail Gorbachev, Howard Stern, Mother Teresa, Oprah, the Emir of Qatar, Reggie Jackson: a local kid done real good. Newspaper clips detailing his accomplishments had been blown up and mounted on poster board. You would never have guessed, if you poked your head in from the Wayne Hills gymnastics dinner in a function room upstairs, or the eightieth-birthday party a few rooms over, that he also faces a possible hundred and forty-two years in federal prison.

Bernard Kerik, like the rest of us, is apparently having financial trouble, though in his case there is the added problem of mounting legal fees. It has been a year since his indictment on sixteen counts of conspiracy, fraud, and providing false information. (Kerik pleaded not guilty, and his lawyers filed a motion to dismiss the charges, which is still pending.) So a group of retired cops and corrections officers calling themselves the Bernard Kerik Legal Defense Trust sent out invitations, a month ago, to "support an American hero," soliciting minimum donations of seventy-five dollars a plate. Kerik is the only New York City police commissioner ever to be indicted for committing a crime during his tenure, so the Rainbow Room or Tavern on the Green was out of the question. They settled for dinner at the Brownstone, a nineteenth-century mansion (though not exactly a brownstone) a few minutes' drive from Eastside High School, which Kerik attended, but did not graduate from, in the late sixties and early seventies. As homecomings go, this was more on the order of Britney returning to Kentwood after the head-shaving and the umbrella than of Springsteen showing up at the Stone Pony. Still, they found more than two hundred takers.

"You here for Bernie Kerik?" one man asked another, near the entrance.

"No, I got Totowa P.A.L."—a youth-football fund-raiser.

"See you at Murphy's later?"

Not everyone was local. General Ahmed Ibrahim, a friend from Kerik's short-lived service in Baghdad, in 2003 (John McCain: "His contribution . . . was less than successful"), had come out for the occasion, and his mustache was nearly as striking as Kerik's. And Monsignor David Cassato, an N.Y.P.D. chaplain, had made the trip from Bensonhurst to offer a blessing. "Tonight, I was supposed to meet Cardinal Martino," Cassato said. "He lives in Rome, and he's very, very close to our Holy Father. I got a call and they said, 'There's this function going on for Bernie.' I said, 'I'm skipping the Cardinal and I'm coming.' If I'd known it was going to be in Paterson . . . "

"He never forgot where he came from, and that is one thing I respect about Bernie," an old colleague from the Passaic County sheriff's department said, sitting at a table in the back.

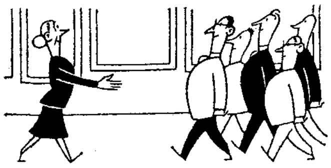
Joseph Kerik, a twenty-three-year-old police officer in Newark ("New York City's little brother, I like to think"), stood to introduce his father after the beefsteaks had been served—and just as the party in the adjacent room was turning up the bass for a salsa dance. "Before I bring him up, I just wanted you to take a look back at some of the things that some people might have forgotten," Joseph said. On the screen behind him, the words "Suddenly you were gone from all the lives you left your mark upon" appeared. For the next fifteen minutes, a soundtrack of strings and bagpipes competed with the dance mix in the next room, as a video of still images from the World Trade Center site played—like an extended Giuliani campaign commercial.

"I was the warden at the Passaic County Jail," Bernie Kerik said, when he took the microphone. "I worked right here in Paterson. I had gold stars, a chief's shield, the car—all the perks that come with the job of being a chief. I was thirty years old, and I left it to become a New York City cop." To a New Yorker, sitting in the back with visions of Judith Regan and the apartment above Ground Zero, it sounded like a cautionary tale. Kerik received a standing ovation. "God bless this country, and thank you," he said.

The following morning, the U.S. Attorney's office in White Plains handed down a new, revised indictment. Oral arguments are expected in January.

—*Ben McGrath*

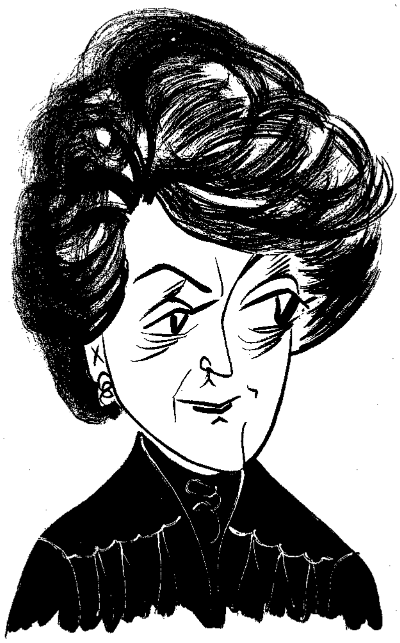
THE BENCH
SPECIAL KAYE



One day in 1993, shortly after Judith S. Kaye became chief judge of New York's highest court, she received a call from her daughter, who was on jury duty at the State Supreme Court, in Foley Square. "You know, Mom," she said, "this is a great place to meet guys." Strolling around that jury-assembly room the other day, Kaye paused, and deadpanned, "That's when I immediately decided to upgrade the jury pool."

Kaye has the prim look of a Park Avenue dowager and the knowing smile of a Bronx pol. She turned seventy this year, so she is obligated to retire from the Court of Appeals at the end of the month. When Kaye became chief judge, New York granted exemptions from jury service to people in twenty-two different occupations—from doctors and lawyers to embalmers and the makers and users of prosthetic devices. "If you could get a lobbyist to Albany, you could get your people out of jury service," she said.

Kaye led a successful fight to abolish all exemptions; now everyone serves. As a result, a total of about six hundred and fifty thousand prospective jurors file, semi-voluntarily, into courtrooms around the state each year. With so many more jurors in the pool, citizens usually serve for a few days, rather than the two weeks that was common in the old days. Kaye's reasons for promoting jury service range from the pragmatic ("We needed to show people, including the media, that the courts actually did work") to the romantic ("The opportunity to sit in judgment of others is one of the great privileges of citizenship").



Judith S. Kaye

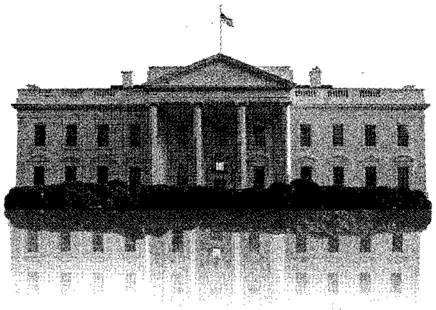
The chief judge has responsibilities that are both rarefied and banal: guiding the jurisprudence of the top court, and supervising the gritty details of the sprawling state judicial system. In her politics, Kaye has reflected the liberal views of Mario Cuomo, the governor who, in 1983, when she was a Manhattan commercial litigator, plucked her from the ranks to make her the first woman on the Court of Appeals. During her tenure, Kaye repeatedly voted to strike down the state's death-penalty laws—no one was executed on her watch—and she filed a passionate dissenting opinion in 2006, when a bare majority of her seven colleagues voted to refuse to recognize the right of gay people to marry. "This State has a proud tradition of affording equal rights to all New Yorkers," she wrote. "Sadly, the Court today retreats from that proud tradition." On the administrative side, Kaye deeply regrets her failure to secure a pay increase for her fellow-judges, who haven't had a raise in eleven years. "That's my 'other than that, Mrs. Lincoln' problem," she said. "It's poisoned everything."

When Kaye took over as chief judge, the Foley Square courthouse was known for its squalid conditions, but as a result of the renovations she championed the building has regained a certain threadbare elegance. As Kaye walked through the dimly lit corridors last week, she resembled a visiting monarch dropping in on her subjects. Kaye's passion for clothes prompted the New York State Bar Association to designate her "chief shopper," and she retains an endearing vanity about her appearance. In the jury room, she declined to take another look at herself in the now venerable video that's shown to prospective jurors. "I don't want to see how I looked ten years ago," she said. Her common touch, while genuine, has its limits: a T-shirt given to her by the State Bar touting her, cereal style, as "Special Kaye" is welcome; purported wit about "Judge Judy" is not.

The jury room, with its dozing strangers awaiting the call to dispense justice, never fails to stir her soul. (Kaye always says "jury service," not "jury duty.") No detail is too small for her attention. The coffee stand, to her regret, can't muster the technology for cappuccino; the in-house magazine for jurors has a crossword puzzle but, per her directive, no answers. "I want the jurors to learn to work together by figuring it out," she said.

Kaye's jury-reform legislation also ended the exemption for judges, and Kaye has dutifully trooped to this very room on three occasions during the past several years. "I wanted to serve," she said. "But every time I heard the lawyer say, 'It's an honor to have you here, Judge,' I knew I was getting bumped. But maybe once this job is off my shoulders I'll have my chance. I think I would be fair."

—*Jeffrey Toobin*



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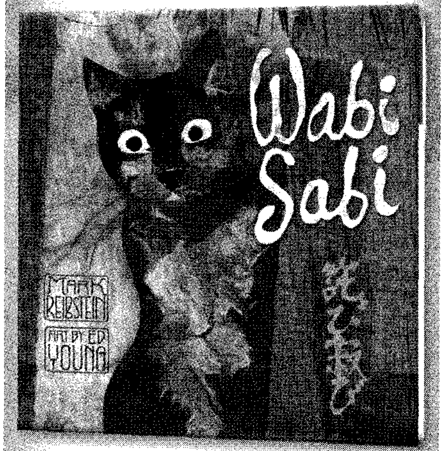

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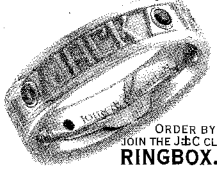

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ANNALS OF EDUCATION

MOST LIKELY TO SUCCEED

How do we hire when we can't tell who's right for the job?

BY MALCOLM GLADWELL

On the day of the big football game between the University of Missouri Tigers and the Cowboys of Oklahoma State, a football scout named Dan Shonka sat in his hotel, in Columbia, Missouri, with a portable DVD player. Shonka has worked for three National Football League teams. Before that, he was a football coach, and before that he played linebacker—although, he says, "that was three knee operations and a hundred pounds ago." Every year, he evaluates somewhere between eight hundred and twelve hundred players around the country, helping professional teams decide whom to choose in the college draft, which means that over the last thirty years he has probably seen as many football games as anyone else in America. In his DVD player was his homework for the evening's big game—an edited video of the Tigers' previous contest, against the University of Nebraska Cornhuskers.

Shonka methodically made his way through the video, stopping and rewinding whenever he saw something that caught his eye. He liked Jeremy Maclin and Chase Coffman, two of the Mizzou receivers. He loved William Moore, the team's bruising strong safety. But, most of all, he was interested in the Tigers' quarterback and star, a stocky, strong-armed senior named Chase Daniel.

"I like to see that the quarterback can hit a receiver in stride, so he doesn't have to slow for the ball," Shonka began. He had a stack of evaluation forms next to him and, as he watched the game, he was charting and grading every throw that Daniel made. "Then judgment. Hey, if it's not there, throw it away and play another day. Will he stand in there and take a hit, with a guy breathing down his face? Will he be able to step right in there, throw, and still take that hit? Does the guy throw better when he's in the pocket, or does he throw equally well when he's on the move? You want a great competitor. Durability. Can they hold up, their strength, toughness? Can they make big plays? Can they lead a team down the field and score late in the game? Can they see the field? When your team's way ahead, that's fine. But when you're getting your ass kicked I want to see what you're going to do."

He pointed to his screen. Daniel had thrown a dart, and, just as he did, a defensive player had hit him squarely. "See how he popped up?" Shonka said. "He stood right there and threw the ball in the face of that rush. This kid has got a lot of courage." Daniel was six feet tall and weighed two hundred and twenty-five pounds: thick through the chest and trunk. He carried himself with a self-assurance that bordered on cockiness. He threw quickly and in rhythm. He nimbly evaded defenders. He made short throws with touch and longer throws with accuracy. By the game's end, he had completed an astonishing seventy-eight per cent of his passes, and handed Nebraska its worst home defeat in fifty-three years. "He can zip it," Shonka said. "He can really gun, when he has to." Shonka had seen all the promising college quarterbacks, charted and graded their throws, and to his mind Daniel was special: "He might be one of the best college quarterbacks in the country."

But then Shonka began to talk about when he was on the staff of the Philadelphia Eagles, in 1999. Five quarterbacks were taken in the first round of the college draft that year, and each looked as promising as Chase Daniel did now. But only one of them, Donovan McNabb, ended up fulfilling that promise. Of the rest, one descended into mediocrity after a decent start. Two were complete busts, and the last was so awful that after failing out of the N.F.L. he ended up failing out of the Canadian Football League as well.

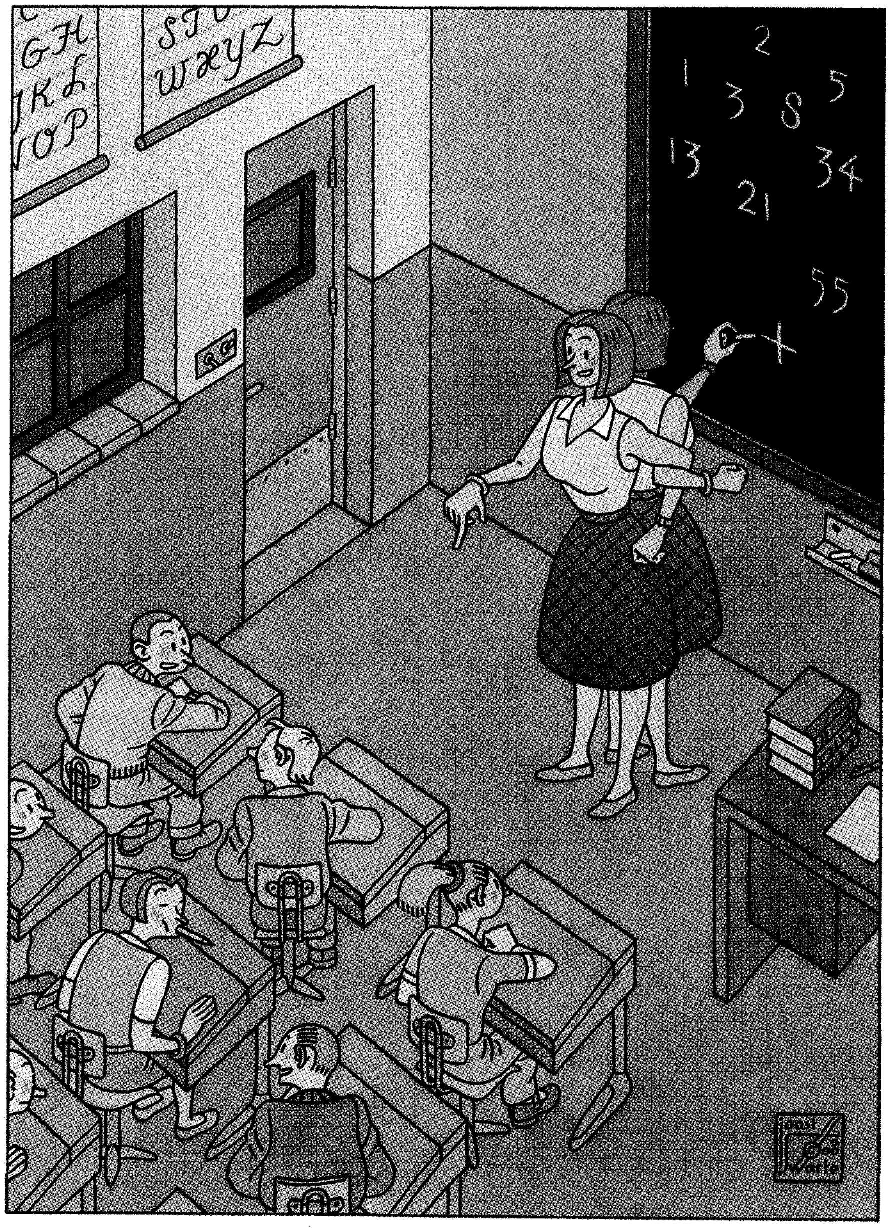
The year before, the same thing happened with Ryan Leaf, who was the Chase Daniel of 1998. The San Diego Chargers made him the second player taken over all in the draft, and gave him an eleven-million-dollar signing bonus. Leaf turned out to be terrible. In 2002, it was Joey Harrington's turn. Harrington was a golden boy out of the University of Oregon, and the third player taken in the draft. Shonka still can't get over what happened to him.

"I tell you, I saw Joey live," he said. "This guy threw lasers, he could throw under tight spots, he had the arm strength, he had the size, he had the intelligence." Shonka got as misty as a two-hundred-and-eighty-pound ex-linebacker in a black tracksuit can get. "He's a concert pianist, you know? I really—I mean, I *really*—liked Joey." And yet Harrington's career consisted of a failed stint with the Detroit Lions and a slide into obscurity. Shonka looked back at the screen, where the young man he felt might be the best quarterback in the country was marching his team up and down the field. "How will that ability translate to the National Football League?" He shook his head slowly. "Shoot."

This is the quarterback problem. There are certain jobs where almost nothing you can learn about candidates before they start predicts how they'll do once they're hired. So how do we know whom to choose in cases like that? In recent years, a number of fields have begun to wrestle with this problem, but none with such profound social consequences as the profession of teaching.

One of the most important tools in contemporary educational research is "value added" analysis. It uses standardized test scores to look at how much the academic performance of students in a given teacher's classroom changes between the beginning and the end of the school year. Suppose that Mrs. Brown and Mr. Smith both teach a classroom of third graders who score at the fiftieth percentile on math and reading tests on the first day of school, in September. When the students are retested, in June, Mrs. Brown's class scores at the seventieth percentile, while Mr. Smith's students have fallen to the fortieth percentile. That change in the students' rankings, value-added theory says, is a meaningful indicator of how much more effective Mrs. Brown is as a teacher than Mr. Smith.

It's only a crude measure, of course. A teacher is not solely responsible for how much is learned in a classroom, and not everything of value that a teacher imparts to his or her students can be captured on a standardized test. Nonetheless, if you follow Brown and Smith for three or four years, their effect on their students' test scores starts to become predictable: with enough data, it is possible to identify who the very good teachers are and who the very poor teachers are. What's more—and this is the finding that has galvanized the educational world—the difference between good teachers and poor teachers turns out to be vast.



Effective teachers have a gift for noticing—what one researcher calls "withitness."

JOOST SWARTE

Eric Hanushek, an economist at Stanford, estimates that the students of a very bad teacher will learn, on average, half a year's worth of material in one school year. The students in the class of a very good teacher will learn a year and a half's worth of material. That difference amounts to a year's worth of learning in a single year. Teacher effects dwarf school effects: your child is actually better off in a "bad" school with an excellent teacher than in an excellent school with a bad teacher. Teacher effects are also much stronger than class-size effects. You'd have to cut the average class almost in half to get the same boost that you'd get if you switched from an average teacher to a teacher in the eighty-fifth percentile. And remember that a good teacher costs as much as an average one, whereas halving class size would require that you build twice as many classrooms and hire twice as many teachers.

Hanushek recently did a back-of-the-envelope calculation about what even a rudimentary focus on teacher quality could mean for the United States. If you rank the countries of the world in terms of the academic performance of their schoolchildren, the U.S. is just below average, half a standard deviation below a clump of relatively high-performing countries like Canada and Belgium. According to Hanushek, the U.S. could close that gap simply by replacing the bottom six per cent to ten per cent of public-school teachers with teachers of average quality. After years of worrying about issues like school funding levels, class size, and curriculum design, many reformers have come to the conclusion that nothing matters more than finding people with the potential to be great teachers. But there's a hitch: no one knows what a person with the potential to be a great teacher looks like. The school system has a quarterback problem.

Kickoff time for Missouri's game against Oklahoma State was seven o'clock. It was a perfect evening for football: cloudless skies and a light fall breeze. For hours, fans had been tailgating in the parking lots around the stadium. Cars lined the roads leading to the university, many with fuzzy yellow-and-black Tiger tails hanging from their trunks. It was one of Mizzou's biggest games in years. The Tigers were undefeated, and had a chance to become the No. 1 college football team in the country. Shonka made his way through the milling crowds and took a seat in the press box. Below him, the players on the field looked like pieces on a chessboard.

The Tigers held the ball first. Chase Daniel stood a good seven yards behind his offensive line. He had five receivers, two to his left and three to his right, spaced from one side of the field to the other. His linemen were widely spaced as well. In play after play, Daniel caught the snap from his center, planted his feet, and threw the ball in quick seven- and eight-yard diagonal passes to one of his five receivers.

The style of offense that the Tigers run is called the "spread," and most of the top quarterbacks in college football—the players who will be drafted into the pros—are spread quarterbacks. By spacing out the offensive linemen and wide receivers, the system makes it easy for the quarterback to figure out the intentions of the opposing defense before the ball is snapped: he can look up and down the line, "read" the defense, and decide where to throw the ball before anyone has moved a muscle. Daniel had been playing in the spread since high school; he was its master. "Look how quickly he gets the ball out," Shonka said. "You can hardly go a thousand and one, a thousand and two, and it's out of his hand. He knows right where he's going. When everyone is spread out like that, the defense can't disguise its coverage. Chase knows right away what they are going to do. The system simplifies the quarterback's decisions."

But for Shonka this didn't help matters. It had always been hard to predict how a college quarterback would fare in the pros. The professional game was, simply, faster and more complicated. With the advent of the spread, though, the correspondence between the two levels of play had broken down almost entirely. N.F.L. teams don't run the spread. They can't. The defenders in the pros are so much faster than their college counterparts that they would shoot through those big gaps in the offensive line and flatten the quarterback. In the N.F.L., the offensive line is bunched closely together. Daniel wouldn't have five receivers. Most of the time, he'd have just three or four. He wouldn't have the luxury of standing seven yards behind the center, planting his feet, and knowing instantly where to throw. He'd have to crouch right behind the center, take the snap directly, and run backward before planting his feet to throw. The onrushing defenders wouldn't be seven yards away. They would be all around him, from the start. The defense would no longer have to show its hand, because the field would not be so spread out. It could now disguise its intentions. Daniel wouldn't be

"You got anything that doesn't have green tea in it?"

able to read the defense before the snap was taken. He'd have to read it in the seconds after the play began.

"In the spread, you see a lot of guys wide open," Shonka said. "But when a guy like Chase goes to the N.F.L. he's never going to see his receivers that open—only in some rare case, like someone slips or there's a bust in the coverage. When that ball's leaving your hands in the pros, if you don't use your eyes to move the defender a little bit, they'll break on the ball and intercept it. The athletic ability that they're playing against in the league is unbelievable."

As Shonka talked, Daniel was moving his team down the field. But he was almost always throwing those quick, diagonal passes. In the N.F.L., he would have to do much more than that—he would have to throw long, vertical passes over the top of the defense. Could he make that kind of throw? Shonka didn't know. There was also the matter of his height. Six feet was fine in a spread system, where the big gaps in the offensive line gave Daniel plenty of opportunity to throw the ball and see downfield. But in the N.F.L. there wouldn't be gaps, and the linemen rushing at him would be six-five, not six-one.

"I wonder," Shonka went on. "Can he see? Can he be productive in a new kind of offense? How will he handle that? I'd like to see him set up quickly from center. I'd like to see his ability to read coverages that are not in the spread. I'd like to see him in the pocket. I'd like to see him move his feet. I'd like to see him do a deep dig, or deep comeback. You know, like a throw twenty to twenty-five yards down the field."

It was clear that Shonka didn't feel the same hesitancy in evaluating the other Mizzou stars—the safety Moore, the receivers Maclin and Coffman. The game that they would play in the pros would also be different from the game they were playing in college, but the difference was merely one of degree. They had succeeded at Missouri because they were strong and fast and skilled, and these traits translate in kind to professional football.

A college quarterback joining the N.F.L., by contrast, has to learn to play an entirely new game. Shonka began to talk about Tim Couch, the quarterback taken first in that legendary draft of 1999. Couch set every record imaginable in his years at the University of Kentucky. "They used to put five garbage cans on the field," Shonka recalled, shaking his head, "and Couch would stand there and throw and just drop the ball into every one." But Couch was a flop in the pros. It wasn't that professional quarterbacks didn't need to be accurate. It was that the kind of accuracy required to do the job well could be measured only in a real N.F.L. game.

Similarly, all quarterbacks drafted into the pros are required to take an I.Q. test—the Wonderlic Personnel Test. The theory behind the test is that the pro game is so much more cognitively demanding than the college game that high intelligence should be a good predictor of success. But when the economists David Berri and Rob Simmons analyzed the scores—which are routinely leaked to the press—they found that Wonderlic scores are all but useless as predictors. Of the five quarterbacks taken in round one of the 1999 draft, Donovan McNabb, the only one of the five with a shot at the Hall of Fame, had the lowest Wonderlic score. And who else had I.Q. scores in the same range as McNabb? Dan Marino and Terry Bradshaw, two of the greatest quarterbacks ever to play the game.

We're used to dealing with prediction problems by going back and looking for better predictors. We now realize that being a good doctor requires the ability to communicate, listen, and empathize—and so there is increasing pressure on medical schools to pay attention to interpersonal skills as well as to test scores. We can have better physicians if we're just smarter about how we choose medical-school students. But no one is saying that Dan Shonka is somehow missing some key ingredient in his analysis; that if he were only more perceptive he could predict Chase Daniel's career trajectory. The problem with picking quarterbacks is that Chase Daniel's performance can't be predicted. The job he's being groomed for is so particular and specialized that there is no way to know who will succeed at it and who won't. In fact, Berri and Simmons found no connection between where a quarterback was taken in the draft—that is, how highly he was rated on the basis of his college performance—and how well he played in the pros.

The entire time that Chase Daniel was on the field against Oklahoma State, his backup, Chase Patton, stood on the sidelines, watching. Patton didn't play a single down. In his four years at Missouri, up to that point, he had thrown a total of twenty-six passes. And yet there were people in Shonka's world who thought that Patton would end up as a better professional quarterback than Daniel. The week of the Oklahoma State game, the national sports magazine *ESPN* even put the two players on its cover, with the title "CHASE DANIEL MIGHT WIN THE HEISMAN"—referring to the trophy given to college football's best player. "HIS BACKUP COULD WIN THE SUPER BOWL." Why did everyone like Patton so much? It wasn't clear. Maybe he looked good in practice. Maybe it was because this season in the N.F.L. a quarterback who had also never started in a single college game is playing superbly for the New England Patriots. It sounds absurd to put an athlete on the cover of a magazine for no particular reason. But perhaps that's just the quarterback problem taken to an extreme. If college performance doesn't tell us anything, why shouldn't we value someone who hasn't had the chance to play as highly as someone who plays as well as anyone in the land?

* * *

Picture a young preschool teacher, sitting on a classroom floor surrounded by seven children. She is holding an alphabet book, and working through the letters with the children, one by one: "'A' is for apple. . . . 'C' is for cow." The session was taped, and the videotape is being watched by a group of experts, who are charting and grading each of the teacher's moves.

After thirty seconds, the leader of the group—Bob Pianta, the dean of the University of Virginia's Curry School of Education—stops the tape. He points to two little girls on the right side of the circle. They are unusually active, leaning into the circle and reaching out to touch the book.

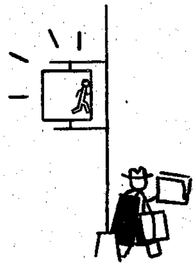
"What I'm struck by is how lively the affect is in this room," Pianta said. "One of the things the teacher is doing is creating a holding space for that. And what distinguishes her from other teachers is that she flexibly allows the kids to move and point to the book. She's not rigidly forcing the kids to sit back."

Pianta's team has developed a system for evaluating various competencies relating to student-teacher interaction. Among them is "regard for student perspective"; that is, a teacher's knack for allowing students some flexibility in how they become engaged in the classroom. Pianta stopped and rewound the tape twice, until what the teacher had managed to achieve became plain: the children were active, but somehow the class hadn't become a free-for-all.

"A lesser teacher would have responded to the kids' leaning over as misbehavior," Pianta went on. "'We can't do this right now. You need to be sitting still.' She would have turned this off."

Bridget Hamre, one of Pianta's colleagues, chimed in: "These are three- and four-year-olds. At this age, when kids show their engagement it's not like the way we show our engagement, where we look alert. They're leaning forward and wriggling. That's their way of doing it. And a good teacher doesn't interpret that as bad behavior. You can see how hard it is to teach new teachers this idea, because the minute you teach them to have regard for the student's perspective, they think you have to give up control of the classroom."

The lesson continued. Pianta pointed out how the teacher managed to personalize the material. "'C' is for cow" turned into a short discussion of which of the kids had ever visited a farm. "Almost every time a child says something, she responds to it, which is what we describe as teacher sensitivity," Hamre said.



The teacher then asked the children if anyone's name began with that letter. "Calvin," a boy named Calvin says. The teacher nods, and says, "Calvin starts with 'C.' " A little girl in the middle says, "Me!" The teacher turns to her. "Your name's Venisha. Letter 'V.' Venisha."

It was a key moment. Of all the teacher elements analyzed by the Virginia group, feedback—a direct, personal response by a teacher to a specific statement by a student—seems to be most closely linked to academic success. Not only did the teacher catch the "Me!" amid the wiggling and tumult; she addressed it directly.

"Mind you, that's not *great* feedback," Hamre said. "High-quality feedback is where there is a back-and-forth exchange to get a deeper understanding." The perfect way to handle that moment would have been for the teacher to pause and pull out Venisha's name card, point to the letter "V," show her how different it is from "C," and make the class sound out both letters. But the teacher didn't do that—either because it didn't occur to her or because she was distracted by the wiggling of the girls to her right.

"On the other hand, she could have completely ignored the girl, which happens a lot," Hamre went on. "The other thing that happens a lot is the teacher will just say, 'You're wrong.' Yes-no feedback is probably the predominant kind of feedback, which provides almost no information for the kid in terms of learning."

Pianta showed another tape, of a nearly identical situation: a circle of preschoolers around a teacher. The lesson was about how we can tell when someone is happy or sad. The teacher began by acting out a short conversation between two hand puppets, Henrietta and Twiggle: Twiggle is sad until Henrietta shares some watermelon with him.

"The idea that the teacher is trying to get across is that you can tell by looking at somebody's face how they're feeling, whether they're feeling sad or happy," Hamre said. "What kids of this age tend to say is you can tell how they're feeling because of something that happened to them. They lost their puppy and that's why they're sad. They don't really get this idea. So she's been challenged, and she's struggling."

The teacher begins, "Remember when we did something and we drew our face?" She touches her face, pointing out her eyes and mouth. "When somebody is happy, their face tells us that they're happy. And their eyes tell us." The children look on blankly. The teacher plunges on: "Watch, watch." She smiles broadly. "This is happy! How can you tell that I'm happy? Look at my face. Tell me what changes about my face when I'm happy. No, no, look at my face. . . . No. . . ."

A little girl next to her says, "Eyes," providing the teacher with an opportunity to use one of her students to draw the lesson out. But the teacher doesn't hear her. Again, she asks, "What's changed about my face?" She smiles and she frowns, as if she can reach the children by sheer force of repetition. Pianta stopped the tape. One problem, he pointed out, was that Henrietta made Twiggle happy by sharing watermelon with him, which doesn't illustrate what the lesson is about.

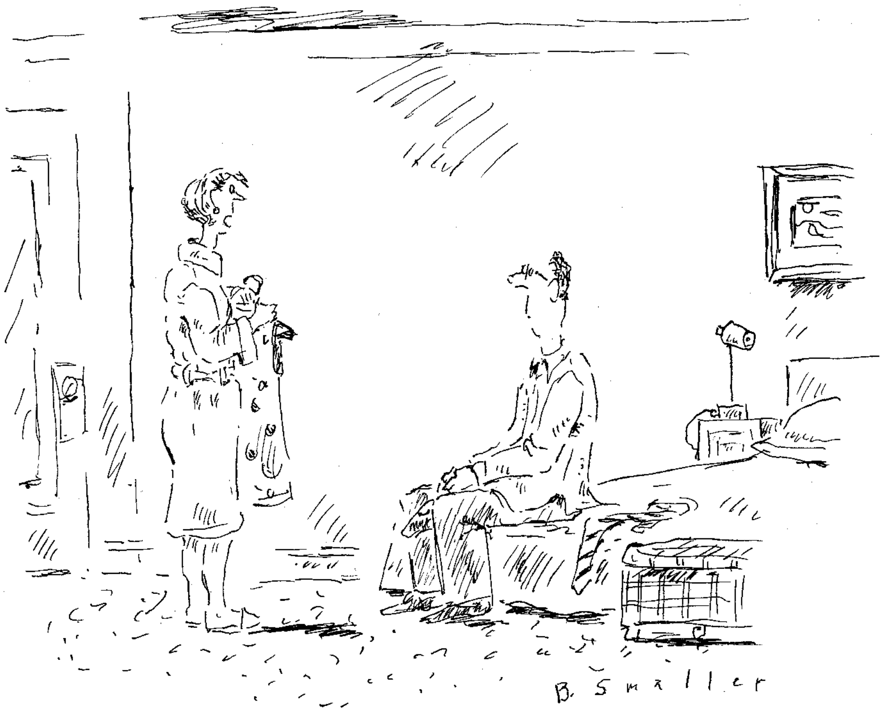
"You know, a better way to handle this would be to anchor something around the kids," Pianta said. "She should ask, 'What makes you feel happy?' The kids could answer. Then she could say, 'Show me your face when you have that feeling? O.K., what does So-and-So's face look like? Now tell me what makes you sad. Show me your face when you're sad. Oh, look, her face changed!' You've basically made the point. And then you could have the kids practice, or something. But this is going to go nowhere."

"What's changed about my face?" the teacher repeated, for what seemed like the hundredth time. One boy leaned forward into the circle, trying to engage himself in the lesson, in the way that little children do. His eyes were on the teacher. "Sit up!" she snapped at him.

As Pianta played one tape after another, the patterns started to become clear. Here was a teacher who read out sentences, in a spelling test, and every sentence came from her own life—"I went to a wedding last week"—which meant she was missing an opportunity to say something that engaged her students. Another teacher walked over to a computer to do a PowerPoint presentation, only to realize that she hadn't turned it on. As she waited for it to boot up, the classroom slid into chaos.

Then there was the superstar—a young high-school math teacher, in jeans and a green polo shirt. "So let's see," he began, standing up at the blackboard. "Special right triangles. We're going to do practice with this, just throwing out ideas." He drew two triangles. "Label the length of the side, if you can. If you can't, we'll all do it." He was talking and moving quickly, which Pianta said might be interpreted as a bad thing, because this was trigonometry. It wasn't easy material. But his energy seemed to infect the class. And all the time he offered the promise of help. *If you can't, we'll all do it.* In a corner of the room was a student named Ben, who'd evidently missed a few classes. "See what you can remember, Ben," the teacher said. Ben was lost. The teacher quickly went to his side: "I'm going to give you a way to get to it." He made a quick suggestion: "How about that?" Ben went back to work. The teacher slipped over to the student next to Ben, and glanced at her work. "That's all right!" He went to a third student, then a fourth. Two and a half minutes into the lesson—the length of time it took that subpar teacher to turn on the computer—he had already laid out the problem, checked in with nearly every student in the class, and was back at the blackboard, to take the lesson a step further.

"In a group like this, the standard m.o. would be: he's at the board, broadcasting to the kids, and has no idea who knows what he's doing and who doesn't know," Pianta said. "But he's giving individualized feedback. He's off the charts on feedback." Pianta and his team watched in awe.



"I don't want your apology—I want you to be sorry."

Educational-reform efforts typically start with a push for higher standards for teachers—that is, for the academic and cognitive requirements for entering the profession to be as stiff as possible. But after you've watched Pianta's tapes, and seen how complex the elements of effective teaching are, this emphasis on book smarts suddenly seems peculiar. The preschool teacher with the alphabet book was sensitive to her students' needs and knew how to let the two girls on the right wiggle and squirm without disrupting the rest of the students; the trigonometry teacher knew how to complete a circuit of his classroom in two and a half minutes and make everyone feel as if he or she were getting his personal attention. But these aren't cognitive skills.

A group of researchers—Thomas J. Kane, an economist at Harvard's school of education; Douglas Staiger, an economist at Dartmouth; and Robert Gordon, a policy analyst at the Center for American Progress—have investigated whether it helps to have a teacher who has earned a teaching certification or a master's degree. Both are expensive, time-consuming credentials that almost every district expects teachers to acquire; neither makes a difference in the classroom. Test scores, graduate degrees, and certifications—as much as they appear related to teaching prowess—turn out to be about as useful in predicting success as having a quarterback throw footballs into a bunch of garbage cans.

Another educational researcher, Jacob Kounin, once did an analysis of "desist" events, in which a teacher has to stop some kind of misbehavior. In one instance, "Mary leans toward the table to her right and whispers to Jane. Both she and Jane giggle. The teacher says, 'Mary and Jane, stop that!' " That's a desist event. But how a teacher desists—her tone of voice, her attitudes, her choice of words—appears to make no difference at all in maintaining an orderly classroom. How can that be? Kounin went back over the videotape and noticed that forty-five seconds before Mary whispered to Jane, Lucy and John had started whispering. Then Robert had noticed and joined in, making Jane giggle, whereupon Jane said something to John. Then Mary whispered to Jane. It was a contagious chain of misbehavior, and what really was significant was not how a teacher stopped the deviancy at the end of the chain but whether she was able to stop the chain before it started. Kounin called that ability "withitness," which he defined as "a teacher's communicating to the children by her actual behavior (rather than by verbally announcing: 'I know what's going on') that she knows what the children are doing, or has the proverbial 'eyes in the back of her head.'" It stands to reason that to be a great teacher you have to have withitness. But how do you know whether someone has withitness until she stands up in front of a classroom of twenty-five wiggly Janes, Lucys, Johns, and Roberts and tries to impose order?

Perhaps no profession has taken the implications of the quarterback problem more seriously than the financial-advice field, and the experience of financial advisers is a useful guide to what could happen in teaching as well. There are no formal qualifications for entering the field except a college degree. Financial-services firms don't look for only the best students, or require graduate degrees or specify a list of prerequisites. No one knows beforehand what makes a high-performing financial adviser different from a low-performing one, so the field throws the door wide open.

"A question I ask is, 'Give me a typical day,' " Ed Deutschlander, the co-president of North Star Resource Group, in Minneapolis, says. "If that person says, 'I get up at five-thirty, hit the gym, go to the library, go to class, go to my job, do homework until eleven,' that person has a chance." Deutschlander, in other words, begins by looking for the same general traits that every corporate recruiter looks for.

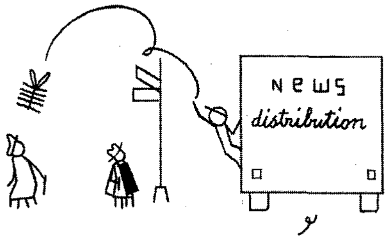
Deutschlander says that last year his firm interviewed about a thousand people, and found forty-nine it liked, a ratio of twenty interviewees to one candidate. Those candidates were put through a four-month "training camp," in which they tried to act like real financial advisers. "They should be able to obtain in that four-month period a minimum of ten official clients," Deutschlander said. "If someone can obtain ten clients, and is able to maintain a minimum of ten meetings a week, that means that person has gathered over a hundred introductions in that four-month period. Then we know that person is at least fast enough to play this game."

Of the forty-nine people invited to the training camp, twenty-three made the cut and were hired as apprentice advisers. Then the real sorting began. "Even with the top performers, it really takes three to four years to see whether someone can make it," Deutschlander says. "You're just scratching the surface at the beginning. Four years from now, I expect to hang on to at least thirty to forty per cent of that twenty-three."

People like Deutschlander are referred to as gatekeepers, a title that suggests that those at the door of a profession are expected to discriminate—to select who gets through the gate and who doesn't. But Deutschlander sees his role as keeping the gate as wide open as possible: to find ten new financial advisers, he's willing to interview a thousand people. The equivalent of that approach, in the N.F.L., would be for a team to give up trying to figure out who the "best" college quarterback is, and, instead, try out three or four "good" candidates.

In teaching, the implications are even more profound. They suggest that we shouldn't be raising standards. We should be lowering them, because there is no point in raising standards if standards don't track with what we care about. Teaching should be open to anyone with a pulse and a college degree—and teachers should be judged after they have started their jobs, not before. That means that the profession needs to start the equivalent of Ed Deutschlander's training camp. It needs an apprenticeship system that allows candidates to be rigorously evaluated. Kane and Staiger have calculated that, given the enormous differences between the top and the bottom of the profession, you'd probably have to try out four candidates to find one good teacher. That means tenure can't be routinely awarded, the way it is now. Currently, the salary structure of the teaching profession is highly rigid, and that would also have to change in a world where we want to rate teachers on their actual performance. An apprentice should get apprentice wages. But if we find eighty-fifth-percentile teachers who can teach a year and a half's material in one year, we're going to have to pay them a lot—both because we want them to stay and because the only way to get people to try out for what will suddenly be a high-risk profession is to offer those who survive the winnowing a healthy reward.

Is this solution to teaching's quarterback problem politically possible? Taxpayers might well balk at the costs of trying out four teachers to find one good one. Teachers' unions have been resistant to even the slightest move away from the current tenure arrangement. But all the reformers want is for the teaching profession to copy what firms like North Star have been doing for years. Deutschlander interviews a thousand people to find ten advisers. He spends large amounts of money to figure out who has the particular mixture of abilities to do the job. "Between hard and soft costs," he says, "most firms sink between a hundred thousand dollars and two hundred and fifty thousand dollars on someone in their first three or four years," and in most cases, of course, that investment comes to naught. But, if you were willing to make that kind of investment and show that kind of patience, you wound up with a truly high-performing financial adviser. "We have a hundred and twenty-five full-time advisers," Deutschlander says. "Last year, we had seventy-one of them qualify for the Million Dollar Round Table"—the industry's association of its most successful practitioners. "We're seventy-one out of a hundred and twenty-five in that élite group." What does it say about a society that it devotes more care and patience to the selection of those who handle its money than of those who handle its children?



Midway through the fourth quarter of the Oklahoma State–Missouri game, the Tigers were in trouble. For the first time all year, they were behind late in the game. They needed to score, or they'd lose any chance of a national championship. Daniel took the snap from his center, and planted his feet to pass. His receivers were covered. He began to run. The Oklahoma State defenders closed in on him. He was under pressure, something that rarely happened to him in the spread. Desperate, he heaved the ball downfield, right into the arms of a Cowboy defender.

Shonka jumped up. "That's not like him!" he cried out. "He doesn't throw stuff up like that."

Next to Shonka, a scout for the Kansas City Chiefs looked crestfallen. "Chase never throws something up for grabs!"

It was tempting to see Daniel's mistake as definitive. The spread had broken down. He was finally under pressure. This was what it would be like to be an N.F.L. quarterback, wasn't it? But there is nothing like being an N.F.L. quarterback except being an N.F.L. quarterback. A prediction, in a field where prediction is not possible, is no more than a prejudice. Maybe that interception means that Daniel won't be a good professional quarterback, or maybe he made a mistake that he'll learn from. "In a great big piece of pie," Shonka said, "that was just a little slice." ♦

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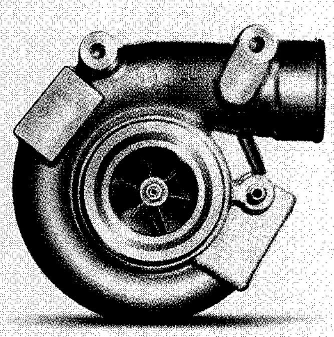

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IS THERE A PROBLEM HERE?

BY LARRY DOYLE

> Due to numerous factors that retailers can't control, 2008 has been a challenging year and it seems this pattern will continue throughout the crucial holiday shopping season.
>
> —*Bill Martin, co-founder of ShopperTrak.*

Yes. Yes, there is. I go to the trouble of driving all the way across town, through three restricted zones, one of them Magenta, just to do my Christmas shopping at your mall, and you expect me to pay for parking?

So then the only space I can find is next to Macy's, which is still on fire, by the way, and a mile from any of the open stores. Do you know how aggravating it is to run past all those cars in primo spots, abandoned and overrun with snakes?

Radio Shack is out of everything: generators, shortwaves, water-filtration units, Tasers, Kevorkians, D batteries. . . . Dude says try the Sharper Image, and then just starts laughing. They won't even let me in the Gap. You have to be a registered Christian to wear their clothes now, apparently. Girl explains it'll make it easier for Jesus at the Rapture. And Petco only has "humane" snake traps. Screw that.

Anyway, the main reason I'm here is to acquire a little Christmas cheer for the wife, and, while I'm at it, something to maybe perk up our love life, which took a major hit when we lost the bedroom furniture to marauders. Victoria's Secret is empty, on account of the Great Sloughing, I suppose. But I still can't get any service. The girl behind the counter, vacant, practically drooling, shows no interest in my wife's lingerie needs. Instead, she offers to take me into a dressing room and try on some outfits for me, at which point I realize, duh, she's a zombie, and I have to take her out. The manager yells at me for not using my silencer, and then says they don't accept American Express, or anything American.

Oh, and hey, that Santa of yours? A lot of kids going into his little house, not a lot coming out. Zombie. I'm just saying.

I decide to grab a bite at your food court before I go, because you never know, right? And that's when I started screaming and shooting things until you came over here. Look at this Southwest Wrap.

What's wrong with it is you're not supposed to taste the snake.

No, you're not. Someone forgot to put on the Special Masking Sauce.

Well, if you're out of Special Masking Sauce you should put up a sign or something. And check out these curly fries.

They're not curly. They're barely even twisted. Watch. When I hold one up, it goes completely limp. But you don't care.

You asked, Is there a problem here? There's your answer. That's the problem. When you stopped worrying about the curliness of your fries, when workers like you stopped worrying about the curliness, or creaminess, or deadliness of their respective fries, that's when this country got on the wrong track; that's when the bankers and the C.E.O.s all disappeared into that underground paradise they've been building since the eighties; that's when women's skin started falling off; that's when the Treasury Department, in a last-ditch effort to solve the financial crisis, certified all Monopoly and other board-game moneys; that's when the rivers ran red, and gelatinous, with what many thought was strawberry Jell-O but really, really was not; that's when the post office finally followed through on its threats to stop Saturday delivery; that's when dogs mated with cats, producing a pet that was unfriendly yet still slobbered all over you; that's when the President and the Congress went on a fact-finding mission to Subterrania and never came back; that's when baboons gained speech but only used it to make hurtful comments; that's when the dead rose and flooded the job market with cheap, disposable labor, and the serpents, seeing an opening, took dominion over this once great nation of ours.

You and your uncurled fries.

Oh, yeah, sure. And the asteroid. Let's all blame the asteroid. ♦

PERSONAL HISTORY

MAKING TOAST

After a daughter dies, a new life with her children.

BY ROGER ROSENBLATT

The trick in foraging for a tooth lost in coffee grounds is not to be misled by the clumps. The only way to be sure is to rub each clump between your thumb and index finger, which makes a mess of your hands. For some twenty minutes this morning, Ginny and I have been hunting in the kitchen trash can for the top left front tooth of our seven-year-old granddaughter, Jessica. Loose for days but not yet dislodged, the tooth finally dropped into a bowl of Apple Jacks. I wrapped it for safekeeping in a paper napkin and put it on the kitchen counter, but it was mistaken for trash by Ligaya, Bubbies's nanny. Bubbies (James) is twenty-three months and the youngest of our daughter Amy's three children. Sammy, who is five, is uninterested in the tooth search, and Jessie is unaware of it. We would prefer to find the tooth, so that Jessie won't worry about the Tooth Fairy not showing up.

This sort of activity has constituted our life since Amy died, last December 8th. The night of her death, Ginny and I drove from our home in Quogue, on the south shore of Long Island, to Bethesda, Maryland, where Amy and her husband, Harris, lived. With Harris's encouragement, we have been there ever since. "How long are you staying?" Jessie asked the next morning. "Forever," I said.

Amy Elizabeth Rosenblatt Solomon, thirty-eight years old, pediatrician, wife of the hand surgeon Harrison Solomon, and mother of three, collapsed on her treadmill in the downstairs playroom at home. "Jessie discovered her," our oldest son, Carl, told us on the phone. Carl lives in Fairfax, Virginia, not far from Amy and Harris, with his wife, Wendy, and their two boys, Andrew and Ryan. Jessie had run upstairs to Harris and told him, "Mommy isn't talking." Harris got to Amy within seconds, and tried CPR, but her heart had stopped and she could not be revived.

Amy's was ruled a "sudden death due to an anomalous right coronary artery"—meaning both her coronary arteries fed her heart from the same side. Her combined arteries could have been squeezed between the aorta and the pulmonary artery, which can expand during physical exercise. The blood flow was cut off. Her condition, affecting less than two thousandths of one per cent of the population, was asymptomatic; she might have died at any time in her life.

Amy would have appreciated the clarity of the verdict. She was a very clear person, even as a small child, knowing intuitively what plain good sense a particular situation required. She had a broad expanse of forehead, dark, nearly black hair, and hazel eyes. Both self-confident and selfless, when she faced you there could be no doubt you were the only thing on her mind.

Her clarity could make her harsh with her family, especially her two brothers. Carl and John, our youngest, withered when she excoriated them for such offenses as invading her room. She could also be slightly cutting in her wit. When she was about to graduate from N.Y.U. Medical School, her class had asked me to be the speaker. A tradition of the school allows a past graduate to place the hood of the gown on a new graduate. Harris, who had graduated the previous year, was set to "hood" Amy. At dinner the night before the ceremony, a friend remarked, "Amy, isn't it great? Your dad is giving the graduation speech, and your fiancé is doing the hood." Amy said, "It is. And it's also pretty great that I'm graduating."

Yet her clarity contributed to her kindness. When she was six, I was driving her and three friends to a birthday party. One of the girls got carsick. The other two girls

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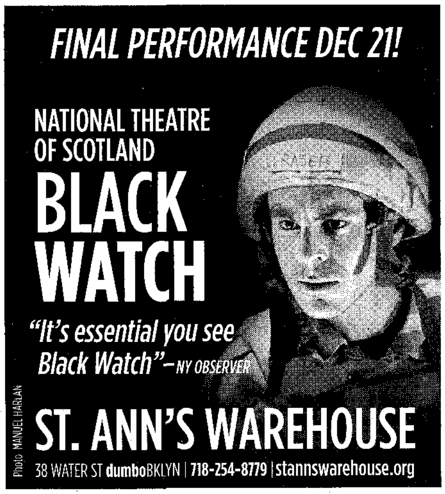
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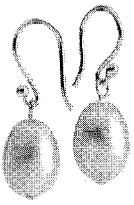
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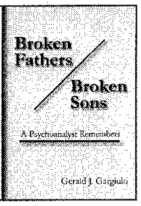
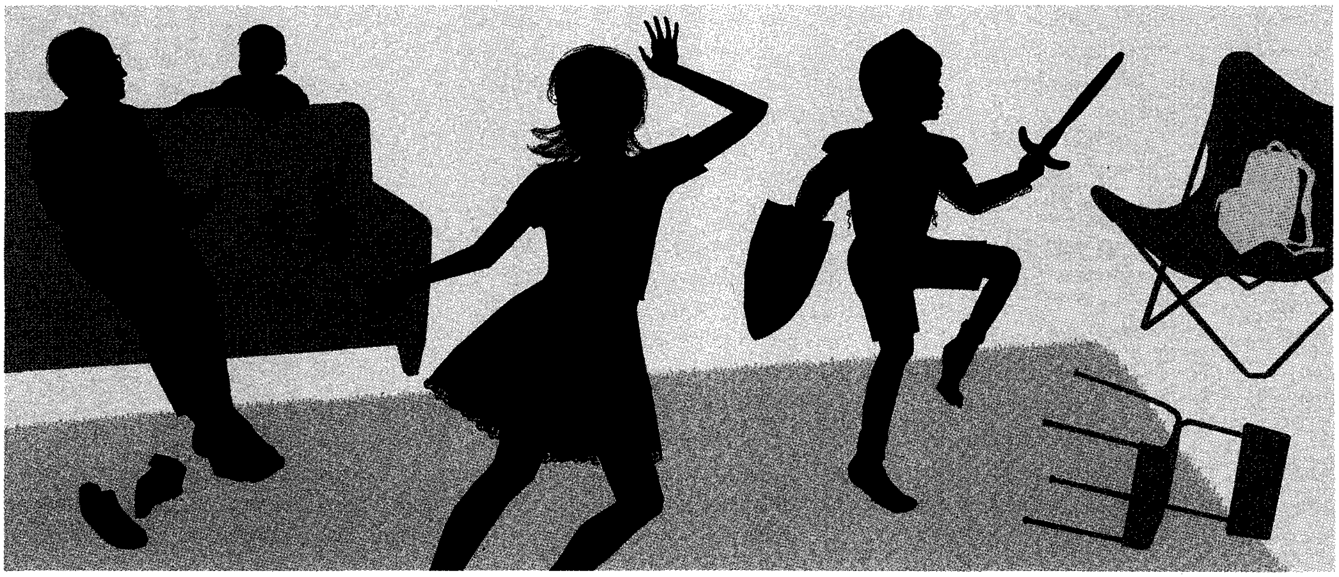


backed away, understandably, with cries of "Ooh!" and "Yuck!" Amy drew closer to the stricken child, to comfort her.



Forgotten aspects of childhood have new capacity to surprise—talking toys, overstuffed schedules, the absence of sequential thought.

YVETTA FEDOROVA

Ginny and I moved from a five-bedroom house, with a den and a large kitchen, to a bedroom with a connected bath—the in-law apartment we used to occupy whenever we visited. We put in a dresser and a desk, and Harris added a TV and a rug. It may have appeared that we were reducing our comforts, but the older one gets the less space one needs, and the less one wants. And we still have the house in Quogue.

I found I could not write and didn't want to. I could teach, however, and it helped me feel useful. I drive from Bethesda to Quogue on Sundays, and meet my M.F.A. writing classes at Stony Brook University on Mondays and Tuesdays. Then back to Bethesda on Wednesdays. The drive takes more than five hours and a tank of gas each way. But it is easier and faster than flying or taking a train.

Road rage was a danger those first weeks. I picked fights with store clerks for no reason. I lost my temper with a student who phoned me too frequently about her work. I seethed at those who spoke of Amy's death in the clichés of modern usage, such as "passing" and "closure." I cursed God. In a way, believing in God made Amy's death more, not less, comprehensible, since the God I believe in is not beneficent. He doesn't care. A friend was visiting Jerusalem when he got the news about Amy. He kicked the Wailing Wall, and said, "Fuck you, God!" My sentiments exactly.

What's Jessie's favorite winter jacket? The blue, not the pink, though pink is her favorite color. Sammy prefers whole milk in his Froot Loops or Multigrain Cheerios. He calls it "cow milk." Jessie drinks only soy milk. She likes a glass of it at breakfast. Sammy prefers water. Such information had to be absorbed quickly. Sammy sees himself as the silver Power Ranger, Jessie is the pink. Sammy's friends are Nico, Jonathan, and Kipper. Jessie's are Oana, Danielle, and Luxmi. There were playdates to arrange, birthday-party invitations to respond to, school forms to fill out. Sammy goes to a private preschool, Jessie to the local public school. We had to master their schedules.

I reaccustomed myself to things about small children I'd forgotten. Talking toys came back into my life. I will be walking with the family through an airport, and the voice of a ventriloquist's dummy in a horror movie will seep through the suitcase. Buzz Lightyear says, "To infinity and beyond!" Another toy says, "I'm a pig. Can we stop?" A talking phone says, "Help me!"

In all this, two things were of immeasurable use to us. First, a friend of Amy's created a Web site inviting other friends to prepare dinners for our family. Participants deposited dinners in a blue cooler outside our front door. Food was provided every other evening, with enough for the nights in between, from mid-December to the beginning of June.

The second was a piece of straightforward wisdom that Bubbies's nanny gave Harris. Ligaya is a small, lithe woman of about forty-five. I know little of her life except that she is from the Philippines, has one grown son here who is a supervisor in a restaurant, and has a work ethic of steel and the flexibility to deal with any contingency. She also shows a sense of practical formality, by calling Bubbies James, to insure that name for his future. Ligaya altered her schedule to be with us twelve hours a day, five days a week—an indispensable gift, especially to her small charge, who giggles with delight when he hears her key in the front door. No one outside the family could have felt Amy's death more acutely. Yet what she said to Harris, and to the rest of us, was dispassionate: "You are not the first to go through such a thing, and you are better able to handle it than most."

It is late December. Bubbies looks around for Amy, says "Mama" when he sees her pictures, and clings to his father. Bubbies has blond hair and a face usually occupied by observant silences. When I am alone with him, he plays happily enough. I've taught him to give me a high five, and when he does I stagger across the room to show him how strong he is. He likes to take a pot from one kitchen cabinet and Zone bars from another, drop the bars in the pot, and put back the lid. He'll do this contentedly for quite a while. When Harris enters the kitchen, Bubbies drops everything, runs to him, and holds him tight at the knees.

Jessie is tall, also blond, with an expression forever on the brink of enthusiasm. Amy used to say that she was the most optimistic person she'd ever known. She is excited about her hip-hop dance class; about a concert her school is giving in Amy's name, to raise money for a memorial scholarship set up at the N.Y.U. School of Medicine; about going to "The Nutcracker." "Do your 'Nutcracker' dance, Boppo," Jessie says. (Ginny is Mimi, I am Boppo.) I swing into my improvised ballet, the high point of which is when I wiggle my ass like the dancing mice. Jessie is also excited about our trip to Disney World in January, the adventure that Amy and Harris had planned months before Amy died. We speak of distant summer plans in Quogue. Jessie is excited.

Sammy is tall, too, with dark hair and wide-set, ruminative eyes. He brings me a book to read, about a caterpillar. He brings another, which just happened to be in the house, called "Lifetimes: The Beautiful Way to Explain Death to Children." The book says, "There's a beginning and an end for everything that is alive. In between is living." The book illustrates its lessons with pictures of birds, fish, plants, and people. I lean back on the couch with Sammy tucked in the crook of my arm, and read to him about the beauty of death.

While Ligaya and Ginny look after Bubbies and Sam, I take Jessie to the bus stop. We stand together at the corner of our street on a gray, damp morning in January. One by one, down the hill come the mothers of the neighborhood, their kids running beside them. An impromptu soccer game develops. Jessie joins in. The scene passes for pleasant and ordinary, unless one notes the odd presence of the lone grandfather.

With luck, Ginny and I will live to see all three children grow into adults, and Jessie will become a teen-ager and throw fits about boyfriends and stamp her feet and yell that we don't understand a thing, not a thing. But today I help her with her oversized pink backpack and her little umbrella with pink butterflies before she boards the school bus. And I stand looking as the bus drives off, and tell the mothers to have a good day.

I wake up earlier than the others, usually around 5 A.M., to perform the one household duty I have mastered. After emptying the dishwasher, setting the table for Jessie and Sam's breakfast, and pouring the Cheerios or Apple Jacks, or Special K or Froot Loops, I prepare toast.

"Reviewing the tape after work relaxes me."

I take out the butter to allow it to soften, and I put three slices of Pepperidge Farm Hearty White in the toaster oven. Bubbies and I like plain buttered toast; Sammy prefers it with cinnamon, with the crusts cut off. When the bell rings, I shift the slices from the toaster to plates, and butter them.

Harris usually spends half the night in Bubbies's little bed. When I go upstairs, around 6 A.M., Bubbies hesitates, but I give him a knowing look and he opens his arms to me. "Toast?" he says. I take him from his father, change him, and carry him downstairs to allow Harris to sleep for another twenty minutes.

The house that Amy and Harris bought in 2004 was a sand-yellow Colonial, built in the nineteen-sixties, and it had substance—a family home for a lifetime. The walls were thick, the hardwood floors level, the oak, black walnut, and poplar trees in the back yard old.

Whenever Ginny and I drove down, we phoned Amy from the car when we were a few minutes away. She would stand framed by the dark-red doorway, holding a child or two. Everyone smiled.

She practiced medicine only two days a week, to be with the children. Her household was like her—lighthearted and full of play, but careful. In the storage area downstairs, there was always a surplus of bandages and paper towels and light bulbs, as well as batteries of every size. To this day, we have not run out of Advil.

She had a gift for custom and ceremony—the qualities Yeats wished for in "A Prayer for My Daughter." Last Thanksgiving, seventeen family members arrived. There were many cooks, not too many, all toiling under Amy's supervision. Harris, his dad, Wendy's dad, Carl, John, and I watched as much football as we were permitted. The hand surgeon carved the turkey, his skill with a knife impressive and creepy. We took our seats at the table. We clasped our glasses. During the previous year, Harris's dad had had a heart valve repaired, and I was treated successfully for prostate cancer and melanoma. Harris raised a toast to the family's renewed health.

Harris's stoicism is undemonstrative. A strong man, built wide and powerful, he easily carries all three children at once in his arms up the stairs. But the sight of his back makes me sad. He performs surgery two days a week and heads orthopedics at Holy Cross Hospital. At home, his few remaining hours are devoted to playing Twister and watching SpongeBob with the kids. He bathes them and tucks them in.

He rarely speaks about Amy, or his feelings. He and I were friends before Amy died, and we talk comfortably about sports and the nonsense of politicians. And we talk a lot about the children. Ginny tells me that when I am away, and she and Harris sit down to their late dinner in the kitchen, her heart breaks for him. "This should be his wife sitting across the table," she says.

He says he doubts that he'll remarry. Self-sufficient, he tends to be a world within himself. He fixes lamps and toilets. He sews. He solves problems with the toys. He makes the hands of others work again. And he has done everything one can do in his situation—encouraging the children to talk about Amy whenever they feel like it, and not to hold back tears. Whenever necessary, he and the children visit a psychologist who specializes in grief counselling. He keeps in close contact with Jessie's and Sam's teachers. But he also deserves a life. He is thirty-nine years old.

Still, he embraces the demands of his life with a gusto that dispenses cheer, and in the lulls we try to keep one another afloat. One night in February, Jessie and Sam had a meltdown as they were going to bed. Ginny and I sat in the living room, listening to Harris's steady voice in the intermissions of the children's wailing. Eventually, they were quieted. He came downstairs and sat staring vacantly at his laptop. "Look," I said, going over to him. "We're never going to get over this. That's a given. But the children will. I promise you. I've seen it elsewhere."

"I'm a scientist," he said. "It's hard for me to deal with things that aren't facts."

Ginny taught kindergarten and first grade in the early years of our marriage. Now she volunteers in the children's schools. She helps Jessie with her homework. I watch them at the kitchen table, bent over a book, and overhear their soft talking. Ginny asks, "How does the chrysalis protect itself against predators?" Jessie says, "It shakes to scare them off."

I do puzzle books with Jessie, and Sammy peppers me with questions about animals and the stars and planets. I can't answer most of his questions. "What are afternoons like on Jupiter?" he asks me. I have to look that up.

I am often confounded by something else I'd forgotten about children: they have no respect for sequential thought. Responding to one of their relentless questions, I will go as deep as I can into an explanation of, say, a solar eclipse. Sammy will ask, "What's the biggest number in the world?" At the same time, Jessie will ask, "How tall will I be, Boppo?" Then Sammy: "Do marlins have lips?"

"So when the moon moves between the earth and the sun . . ."

"What are you talking about, Boppo?"

Bubbies has been attending to his own education—proceeding from one word, to several, to two-word sentences, to three and more. Some say that children learn to speak in order to tell the stories already in them. An early word of his was "back." He wanted reassurance that when any of us left the house, or even a room, we were coming back. He has always used one-word sentences to his advantage, his vocabulary consisting mainly of references to things he favors—the mower, the stove, birds, bananas. The single words suit his despotic streak. "Outside" means "Let's move it, Boppo!"

Jessie's teacher occasionally invites me to visit her first-grade class. They ask about writing. But the first graders seem to know at least as much as I do. Ms. Carone asks me how a character is developed. I bumble through an answer. She asks the children to write a story with a main character, then list his or her qualities—loyal, jealous, brave, generous. Each child stands before the class to answer questions. Arthur writes about a superhero.

"Anything you'd like to ask Arthur?" Ms. Carone says to the others.

One girl asks, "Does your superhero tell the truth?"

Arthur thinks and says yes.

"Always?" the girl asks.

In a rare tranquil moment on a March afternoon, I sit on the green couch in the lower-level play area, reading Alice McDermott's "After This." It is around four-thirty, and the light has gone from the day. Jessie comes downstairs and asks why I am so quiet. "I'm reading," I tell her. She takes one of her own books from the coffee table and sits beside me, extending her long legs over the front of the couch. We sit in silence, reading, five feet from where Amy collapsed and died. I look up from time to time, then return to my book.

Sammy hurtles downstairs and demands to know where his knight outfit is. Amazingly, I spot the outfit, which consists of silver pants, a shirt of mail, a shield, a sword, and a helmet with a visor. Sammy puts it on at once, lowers the visor over his face, and parades back and forth before the couch.

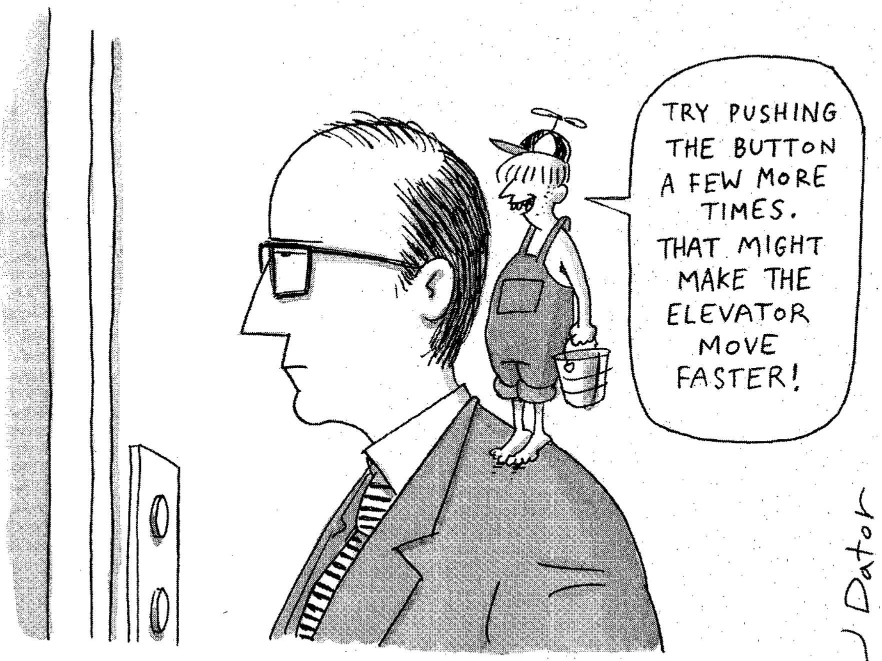
Jessie drops her book and plays a song from "High School Musical 2" at full blast on the stereo. She dances in front of the couch as Sir Sam marches. Bubbies climbs down the stairs, Ligaya trailing behind him. He dances, too.

Throughout the winter and the spring, there is hardly a moment for anything but play, caretaking, schooling, chauffeuring, and, by 9 P.M., sleep. Jessie has soccer; Sammy has a party; Jess and Sam have tennis; Sammy has a playdate; Bubbies has "gym" (an hour in which babies waddle around a large, highly polished floor, heedless of the commands of an "instructor," and bump into one another); Jessie starts piano.

We lived in Washington, D.C., in the nineteen-seventies, when I worked at *The New Republic* and wrote a column for the Washington *Post*. One column, called "No Sleep-Overs," was a father's complaint about what was then the recent practice of overstuffing a child's day with lessons and social life. I received more hate mail in response to that piece than to anything I wrote against capital punishment or in favor of gun control. Clearly, I was out of touch, as usual.

These days, I am grateful for the children's crammed schedules. Between December and June, Sammy and Jessie had birthdays, advancing to five and seven, and Bubbies went from fourteen months to twenty-one. His transformation seemed like one of those time-lapse tricks in movies. In April, we celebrated Amy's birthday, too. When we blew out the candles, Harris asked Sammy what he thought Mommy would wish for. "To be alive," Sammy said.

He looks more like his father now,


TRY PUSHING THE BUTTON A FEW MORE TIMES. THAT MIGHT MAKE THE ELEVATOR MOVE FASTER!
Dator

THE IDIOT ON MY SHOULDER

with a face that mixes independence and innocence. Jessie has perfected the ironic smile of a grown woman. When Sammy was going over the invitation list for his birthday party, which consisted of everyone in his class, he was asked if he was sure he wanted to include the class bully. "Yes," he said. "I wouldn't want him to cry." When, in a terrible coincidence, the mother of a girl in Jessica's class died suddenly, Jessie said, "She can live with us."

All the grandchildren came to Quogue for the month of August—Jessie, Sam, Bubbies, Andrew, and Ryan. A year earlier, Ginny and I had begun to convert our garage to a playhouse. We wanted a place where the grandchildren could paint, work with clay, race cars, and fight over games. Amy had been in on the plans, and after she died the project became a kind of therapy. I cleaned out junk closets, gave order to a chaotic shelf of DVDs, and cleared an ivy-choked area of the back yard.

We built a small stage, and one of the children's early productions was a reënactment of "American Idol." I played Paula. Another was a play based on Sammy's imagined utopia of Moseybane. We called it "The King of Moseybane." Harris ordered costumes online for Sammy (the King), Ryan (the Prince), Jessie (the Wizard), and Andrew (the Knight). Boppo (the Dragon) and Bubbies (the Narrator) required no costumes.

On opening night (which coincided with closing night), Ryan appeared onstage with his mother, Wendy. Andrew would not appear at all at first, but, when coaxed, delivered his lines from memory. Jessie's over-the-top Wizard was indistinguishable from her "American Idol" audition. The King looked stunned with his own power. Bubbies decided that his one line, "Dookies"—his word for his favorite cookie—would be more effective if delivered from the driveway, fifty feet from the stage, with Harris beside him. The Dragon had to read all the parts, except Andrew's. But the audience—my brother Peter, two friends, and the remaining grownups—was appreciative. The bewildered cast received a standing ovation.

Amy and Harris were married in our Quogue house on one of those fiercely bright June days which draw artists to eastern Long Island. We rented a big white tent, which billowed in the wind on the front lawn. Amy and Harris chose a band from New York that played mostly sixties music. There were blue blazers and red ties and navy-blue dresses with white trim, and many white roses. The sky was clear as glass.

We had asked Amy what sort of ceremony she and Harris wanted, and she said they'd like a friend of ours, a well-known cartoonist, to marry them. After making inquiries, we learned that New York State does not permit cartoonists (or any other layperson, for that matter) to perform wedding ceremonies, so we had two ceremonies—one by the cartoonist and a legal one performed by another family friend who actually was a minister. The cartoonist said many beautiful things to the couple, before telling the assembled that he was marrying Amy and Harris with the power vested in him "by the State of Euphoria."

Bubbies sits in my lap in the den, in Quogue. He locks his hands behind his head when he relaxes. I do the same. We sit there in a lopsided brown leather chair—same pose, sitting in tandem, like luge drivers.

One evening, he points to the shelf to his left and says, "Book." He indicates "The Letters of James Joyce," edited by Stuart Gilbert. It seems an ambitious choice for a twenty-three-month-old boy, but I take down the book and prop it up before us.

"Dear Bubbies," I begin. "I went to the beach today and played in the sand. I also built a castle. I hope you will come play with me soon. Love, James Joyce."

Bubbies seems content, so I "read" another: "Dear Bubbies, Went to the playground today. Tried the slide. It was a little scary. I like the swings better. I can go very high, just like you. Love, James Joyce."

Bubbies turns the pages. I occasionally amuse myself with an invented letter closer to the truth of Joyce's life and personality: "Dear Bubbies, I hate the Catholic Church, and am leaving Ireland forever. Love, James Joyce."

It tickles me that Bubbies has chosen to latch on to a writer who gladly would have stepped on a baby to get a great review.

I try to put back the book, but he detects an implicit announcement of his bedtime, and he protests. "Joyce!" he says.

Eventually, he resigns himself to the end of his day. He puts the book back himself, and quietly says, "Joyce."

Late in August, we return to Bethesda for the first days of the children's schools. Bubbies begins preschool. School for someone thirty inches high—it seems preposterous. Jessie starts second grade, Sammy kindergarten. He is excited, mainly about taking the school bus. The first day, Sammy's bus runs out of oil on the way home.

"What was your favorite part of the day?" I ask him later.

"When the school bus couldn't move," he says. Harris says that might turn out to be Sam's favorite part of the whole year.

On the weekend, we visit the cemetery. Each time, I go with a mixture of need and trepidation, because I know I may break down at the sight of the small rectangle of earth, the boxwood outlining it, the conical brass receptacle for flowers, and the marker, which is so definite. When we chose this spot, in December, the nearby office buildings showed through the shorn trees. Since spring the area has burgeoned with dogwoods and magnolias.

Jessie has brought white carnations; Sammy a Washington Redskins balloon in the shape of an oversized football, which he plans to release into the air. He seems fragile these days—drifting into faraway stares and silences. When we went bowling a week earlier, I took him to the men's room. Walking out, he forgot to pull up his pants.

Yet he talks more about Amy's death. Yesterday morning, he asked me again how Mommy died: "The heart stopped. Right?" His first day of kindergarten, when the children were asked to draw pictures of their families, Sam's drawing included Amy lying dead on the floor.

At the gravesite, Harris asks him if he has something to say. He stands behind the marker and says, "I miss you, Mommy." He tells Amy about Bubbies's first teacher in preschool, Ms. Franzetti, and about Jessie's second-grade teacher, Mrs. Salcetti, and about his own, Ms. Merritt. He tells Amy about the balloon, and predicts that the Redskins will win the Super Bowl. Jessie has no message for Amy today.

Sammy asks Harris if he can be buried next to Mommy. Harris says yes, but tells him it's a very long way off.

Ginny and I take turns holding Bubbies, who carries a small plastic penguin. When you squeeze its "trigger," its beak opens and shuts, its little wings flap, and the penguin squawks. On an earlier visit to the cemetery, Bubbies refused to be taken from his car seat, and cried out, "No, no, no!" Today he has his penguin, and is content simply to look around.

Jessie places the carnations in the conical vessel. Harris writes "We love you, Mommy" on the football balloon. The children let it go. It flies up in the heavy air and snags on a distant tree. We assure the children that the wind will free it eventually.

Once in a while, Ginny is brought low by a photograph of Amy or by another artifact attached to a memory. I am felled more often by mundane problems and momentary concerns, such as choosing a shirt to wear or remembering to take a vitamin—since nothing will ever be normal again. Harris moves forward.

One of the few pieces of writing I have done in the year since Amy died was a book review for the Washington *Post Book World*. The novel was David Lodge's "Deaf Sentence"—about a retired linguistics professor, Desmond Bates, who is losing his hearing and who is also deaf to life until, against his will, he visits Auschwitz, where the silence teaches him to hear. He reads a letter from a prisoner in the camp to his wife, discovered in a pile of human ashes. One sentence rises up to Desmond: "If there have been, at various times, trifling misunderstandings in our life, now I see how one was unable to value the passing time." As far as I can tell, this is how to live—to value the passing time.

It is early September. Shortly before 6 A.M., the morning is dark—black clouds, black sky. On TV, the newscasts speak of Hurricane Gustav lumbering toward New Orleans. I hear Bubbies over the monitor, go upstairs, and take him from Harris.

We look out the glass door. "Raining," Bubbies says.

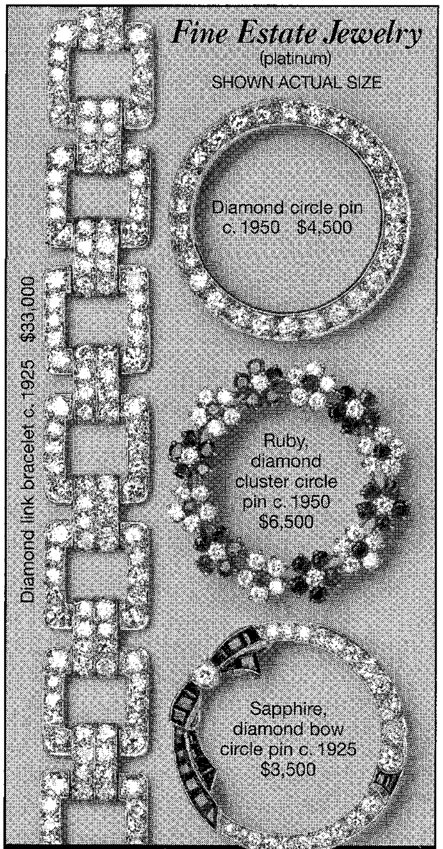
"Not yet," I tell him. "But it's dark."

"Raining."

"Yes, it'll probably rain, Bubs. Grapes?"

"Toast," he says.

I put him in his booster seat. He buckles up. I bring his grapes and toast, along with my own toast and coffee. We eat. ♦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A REPORTER AT LARGE

ATOMIC JOHN

A truck driver uncovers secrets about the first nuclear bombs.

BY DAVID SAMUELS

The single, blinding release of pure energy over Hiroshima, Japan, on August 6, 1945, marked a startling and permanent break with our prior understandings of the visible world. Yet for more than sixty years the technology behind the explosion has remained a state secret. The United States government has never divulged the engineering specifications of the first atomic bombs, not even after other countries have produced generations of ever more powerful nuclear weapons. In the decades since the Second World War, dozens of historians have attempted to divine the precise mechanics of the Hiroshima bomb, nicknamed Little Boy, and of the bomb that fell three days later on Nagasaki, known as Fat Man. The most prominent is Richard Rhodes, who won a Pulitzer Prize, in 1988, for his dazzling and meticulous book "The Making of the Atomic Bomb." But the most accurate account of the bomb's inner workings—an unnervingly detailed reconstruction, based on old photographs and documents—has been written by a sixty-one-year-old truck driver from Waukesha, Wisconsin, named John Coster-Mullen, who was once a commercial photographer, and has never received a college degree.

I first came across Coster-Mullen's name in January of 2004, after I attended an exhibit by the artist Jim Sanborn, at the Corcoran Gallery of Art, in Washington, D.C. The show, called "Critical Assembly," included what appeared to be spookily exact replicas of the interior mechanism of the first atomic bomb, which Sanborn had manufactured according to Coster-Mullen's specifications. A year later, I read an article in the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* that mentioned a six-hundred-mile trip Coster-Mullen had taken across the Midwest with a full-scale model of the Hiroshima bomb in the back of a Penske rental truck. He had built the replica with the help of his son, Jason, in his garage, basing it, in part, on his analysis of sixty-year-old screws, bolts, and fragments of machined steel that had been stored in rural basements and attics.

The mention of Coster-Mullen's journey led me back to the November/December, 2004, issue of the *Bulletin*, which included a review of a book by Coster-Mullen titled "Atom Bombs: The Top Secret Inside Story of Little Boy and Fat Man." The review, written by the eminent atomic historian Robert S. Norris, began, "For many years, Coster-Mullen has been printing his manuscript at Kinko's (adding to and revising it along the way) and selling spiral-bound copies at conferences or over the Internet." Norris clearly considered Coster-Mullen's understanding of the bomb superior to his own. It was known that Little Boy and Fat Man brought together two masses of fissile material inside a bomb casing, forming a critical mass that set off a nuclear explosion. Little Boy shot one mass of highly enriched uranium into the other with a gunlike mechanism; Fat Man used explosives to squeeze together two hemispheres of plutonium. But the exact details of how these devices worked were unknown. Norris said of Coster-Mullen's work, "Nothing else in the Manhattan Project literature comes close to his exacting breakdown of the bomb's parts. Coster-Mullen describes the size, weight, and composition of many of Little Boy's components, including the nose section and its target case; the uranium-235 target rings and tamper; the arming and fuzing system; the forged steel 6.5-inch-in-diameter gun barrel through which the uranium-235 projectile was fired at the target rings; and the tail section—to cite just a few."

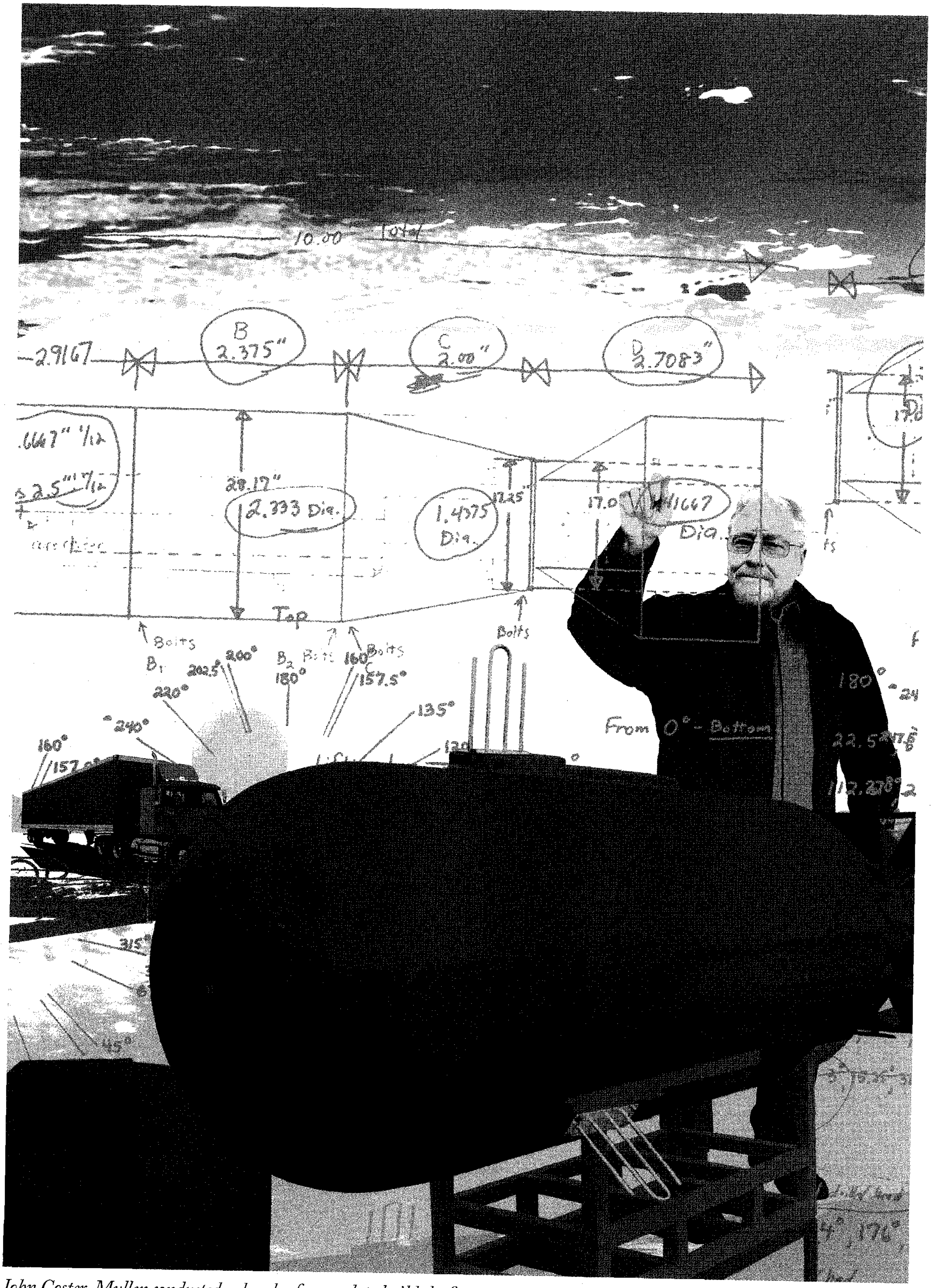
My own copy of "Atom Bombs" soon arrived in the mail, along with a sheet of testimonials from Harold Agnew, the former director of the Los Alamos National Laboratory, who was aboard the Enola Gay when it annihilated Hiroshima (a "most amazing document"); Philip Morrison, one of the physicists who helped invent the bomb ("You have done a remarkable job"); and Paul Tibbets, the commander and pilot of the Enola Gay ("I was very much impressed"). "Atom Bombs" consists of densely interlocking sentences, nearly all of which contain dimensional information that contradicts the assertions of previous authorities. "A circular steel plate was positioned inside the 17.0"-diameter tail cylinder at the front of the tail tube and another towards the rear of the tube," Coster-Mullen writes. "These allowed the tail to be slid over the 10.5"-diameter gun tube during assembly. The forward plate was positioned 26.5" in front of the aft plate and was welded to the front of the tail tube."

Though the book's specificity about dimensions, shapes, and materials was mind-numbing, the accumulation of detail was strangely seductive. As Coster-Mullen described how the different parts of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs fit together, I felt that I could practically assemble an atomic weapon myself.

The text was followed by more than a hundred pages of declassified photographs extracted from half a dozen government archives, which showed the weapons at various stages of completion—surrounded by scientists in New Mexico or by tanned, shirtless crew members on Tinian Island, in the Western Pacific, just before the bombs were dropped. Coster-Mullen's book concluded with thirty-five pages of end notes, including a hilariously involved discussion of the textural differences in the gold foil used to separate the plutonium hemispheres for the first atomic bomb, Trinity (dimpled), and the Nagasaki bomb (flat).

Coster-Mullen sees his project as a diverting mental challenge—not unlike a crossword puzzle—whose goal is simply to present readers with accurate informa-

JOHN RITTER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John Coster-Mullen conducted a decade of research to build the first accurate replica of the Hiroshima bomb.

tion about the past. "This is nuclear archeology," he told me, in a late-night phone call. "It's like any other kind of archeology." Though the government does not make a practice of providing Coster-Mullen with timely responses to his technical inquiries, no official has actively discouraged him from pursuing his research. After a period of mild equivocation, he decided to publish all the details he had uncovered about the mechanics and production of the bomb, even though the subject remains classified. "I was acting like a classification officer," he recalls. "'I can have the truth and you can't.' Who am I to say that?"

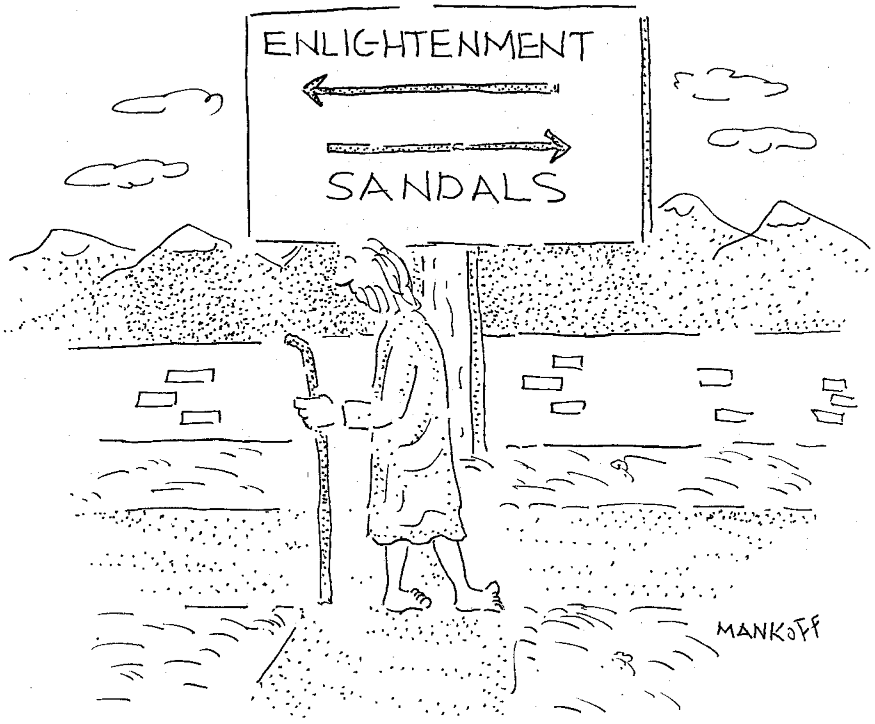
Among other things, Coster-Mullen's book makes clear that our belief in the secrecy of the bomb is a theological construct, adopted in no small part to shield ourselves from the idea that someone might use an atomic bomb against us. Surely, hostile powers could obtain the kind of information that Coster-Mullen has acquired, however painstakingly, in his spare time. Any nation that can master the challenges of the atomic-fuel cycle and produce a critical mass of uranium or plutonium, as Iran is reported to be on the verge of doing, would have little difficulty in producing a workable bomb. Given a sufficient quantity of highly enriched uranium, a small number of engineers working for a terrorist group like Al Qaeda or Hezbollah could easily assemble a homemade nuclear device.

I recently wrote to Coster-Mullen and suggested that we take a trip across the country to visit his Little Boy replica, which is currently housed at Wendover, a decommissioned Air Force base in Utah. After some negotiation, we agreed to ride together on his late-night delivery route between Waukesha and Chicago. We would then drive to Wendover. Along the way, he would explain the inner workings of the first atomic bombs, and I would learn how he got it right and the experts got it wrong.

Coster-Mullen and I met in the darkened parking lot of a regional distribution center for a big-box retailer, some ten miles outside Waukesha. Dressed in Lee jeans and a tan shirt with the J. B. Hunt logo, he had titanium-frame glasses, blue-gray eyes, and a full head of silvery hair. The distribution center was the size of seven or eight football fields; fans roaring overhead and an enormous conveyor belt drowned out the beeps of cabs backing up to trailers. Coster-Mullen picked up his sheet for the night, which involved stops at Store 1950, in Streamwood, Illinois, and Store 1889, in downtown Chicago. He was to drop off a container filled with lawn furniture in Streamwood, and haul back "sweep" merchandise—cardboard boxes, defective items, coat hangers—from Chicago. We walked outside and hooked up Coster-Mullen's truck to trailer No. 537427, with a solid click. It was seven o'clock on a Sunday night. He calmly recited a safety checklist ("My lights are on, my flashers are on") and we set off.

Over the years, Coster-Mullen told me, he had held nearly a dozen jobs, including working at camera stores in and around Milwaukee; doing inventory control for the Beloit Corporation, which manufactured paper-making equipment; taking photographs of industrial equipment for Trane, the heating and air-conditioning company, and then for Mercury Marine, which makes high-quality engines for boats; working as a studio photographer for Pohlman Studios, in Milwaukee; and running his own photography business. These jobs had provided him with the skills, he says, that helped him solve the puzzle of the bomb. I asked him how he wound up driving a truck. "They are always hiring," he said. "I figured if people with the brains of a squirrel could drive a truck, maybe I could drive a truck."

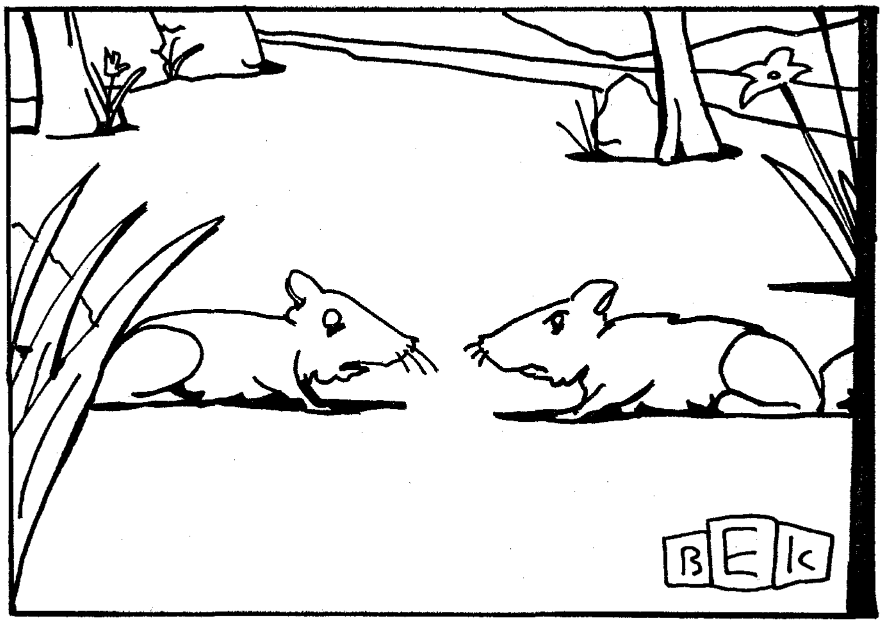
The highway cut through scrubland, and by nightfall Coster-Mullen was driving past Old World Wisconsin, a tourist attraction that features restorations of prairie homesteads. Making long cross-country drives, Coster-Mullen said, had given him plenty of time to reëxamine the three-dimensional diagram of the bomb that he keeps in his head, like a Buddhist monk contemplating the Karmic wheel. His truck routes also made it easy for him to maintain connections with sources. Twelve years ago, Coster-Mullen pulled into a Wal-Mart parking lot in North Carolina and got into the car of a retired machinist in his late seventies, who showed him photographs of metal pieces that he had fashioned for the Trinity bomb, which was set off in the desert outside Alamogordo, New Mexico, in July, 1945. Coster-Mullen said that machinists often hid the fragments in their shoes and pants cuffs, in order to have something to show their grandchildren. Two years after meeting the machinist, in 1998, Coster-Mullen, while driving through Nebraska with three cars in front of him, figured out the exact shape and weight of the pieces of uranium inside Little Boy. "I'm sitting there with my pocket calculator, going, 'If the



core had this diameter, and the length is this, what's the volume?'" he recalled. "I went, 'That's it!' And then I got on the horn—*urh-urh.*"

Arriving at the drop-off point in Streamwood, we unhooked the truck's electric and air lines, then turned the crank on the landing gear forty times. We picked up another container, got back in the truck, and headed south, toward Chicago. At four in the morning, we passed the Sears Tower. Coster-Mullen gingerly navigated the pillars inside an indoor parking garage and pulled up to the loading dock.

The trailer, which contained thirty-one thousand pounds of FAK—"freight of all kinds"—wasn't ready yet, so we checked out the bales of sweep merchandise: crushed boxes of cookies, dented cans, ripped jeans. Finally, we hooked up the trailer and hit the road. As we headed north, Coster-Mullen explained to me the likely blast effects of a Hiroshima-size nuclear device exploding in a container truck in downtown Chicago. He said, "All you need to do is take two subcritical masses of uranium and smash them into each other to form a critical mass. Neutrons strike the heavy uranium nucleus, which splits, releasing a tremendous jolt of energy along with two or more neutrons, which split more nuclei, setting off a chain reaction that grows and grows and finally manifests itself as a huge fireball over a populated area, blinding, asphyxiating, incinerating, or crushing every living being within a five-mile radius." As he elaborated on the scenario, the sun began to rise, and I fell asleep with my face against the window.



"This place would be so bucolic without you."

We arrived at Coster-Mullen's home, in Waukesha, around eight o'clock that morning. He lives in a ranch house on a cul-de-sac in a pleasant subdivision. His wife, Mary, is a retired social worker who spends most of her time reading and knitting. They have two children together, and Coster-Mullen has a third from a previous marriage. Asters, black-eyed Susans, and coral bells blossomed beneath the trees in the back yard. Coster-Mullen, in anticipation of my visit, had arrayed his kitchen with some of his atom-bomb memorabilia, including a roof tile from the hypocenter of the Hiroshima blast, which he purchased for eighty-nine dollars from a former member of the U.S. radiation-survey team. He also owns a brick of graphite from Enrico Fermi's lab at the University of Chicago—the site of the first reactor pile—which he was given by two physicists who were fans of his book; a small marine fossil that was underneath the Trinity bomb when it exploded in the New Mexico desert, which Coster-Mullen dug out of the ground himself during a visit to the site; silicone molds of the detonator for the Trinity bomb; a chunk of uranium; and a sphere of beryllium, a component of modern atomic bombs.

He handed me a leaflet that had been dropped over Japan by B-29 bombers in late July, 1945. "Attention Japanese People," the leaflet says. "In the next few days, four (or more) of the cities named on the reverse side will be destroyed by American bombs. These cities contain military installations and workshops or factories that produce military goods. We are determined to destroy all of the tools of the military clique."

On the kitchen counter sat something seemingly unconnected to atomic weapons: a hobbyist's model of the Joan of Arc chapel, on the campus of Marquette University, in Milwaukee. In fact, Coster-Mullen told me, the model, which he completed in 1993, had helped spark his obsession with building his own bomb. He had built the model in the hope of launching a business. Marquette alumni and other visitors, he had figured, would eagerly buy replicas of the chapel and display them in their homes. Constructing the model was difficult, he recalled: "I was using dental picks and surgical 3-D glasses and I learned how to carve little eyes in the wood benches." Like most of his business ideas, before and since, the project showed both a fanatical devotion to detail and a hazy grasp of what ordinary consumers might pay for. He placed the chapel models in local gift shops on consignment, but few sold. After this failure, Coster-Mullen decided to make replicas of something with wider commercial appeal.

In December, 1993, he persuaded his son, Jason, who was then seventeen, to accompany him on a road trip to the National Atomic Museum, in Albuquerque, where Coster-Mullen could examine the empty ballistic casing of an atomic bomb at first hand and make sketches that he could use to build an accurate scale model. After driving two thousand miles to the museum, he was distressed to find that the atomic-weapons area was closed for renovation. He protested until his contact at the museum finally appeared and let them in. He and Jason spent hours measuring the bomb casings on display. (In the early nineties, after the fall of the Soviet Union, no one was particularly disturbed by the sight of a father and son poking measuring tape inside the casings of fifty-year-old bombs.) The Coster-Mullens were soon measuring weapons casings around the country, including at the Wright-Patterson base, in Ohio; the West Point Museum, in the Hudson Valley; and the Smithsonian, in Washington, D.C. They also saw the Fat Man display at the Bradbury Science Museum, in Los Alamos.

During these and other excursions, Coster-Mullen discovered that much of the dimensional information about the bombs in history books was wrong. "Rhodes and others said that Little Boy is twenty-nine inches in diameter—but it's not, it's twenty-eight," he said, in the friendly, matter-of-fact tone he uses to soften the force of his obsession. Wondering what other errors the historians had made, he began to attend reunions of the 509th Composite Group, the military unit that dropped the bombs. He went to his first reunion in 1994, in Chicago. Before the gathering, he wrote a draft of a pamphlet about the bomb and sent it to Frederick Ashworth, a naval commander who was in charge of the Fat Man weapon. "The Monday of the reunion week, I get this letter back from Admiral Ashworth, who, justifiably, took me to task," Coster-Mullen recalls. "He said, 'Either treat this subject with the seriousness it deserves or drop it.' So I chose the former."

Coster-Mullen spent the next ten years of his life mastering a body of recondite technical data. He extracted photographs from government archives and scrutinized them with a magnifying glass; he interviewed one retired machinist after another, as well as scientists and engineers. Researching the bomb provided Coster-Mullen with an outlet for a sensibility that might have been equally at home collecting tropical butterflies or double-print stamps. To suggest that Coster-Mullen is a garden-variety classification freak, however, is like comparing a high-school trumpet player to Miles Davis. Driven by his desire to solve a great puzzle, he is personally affronted by recycled information and secondary sourcing, which often leads him to express contempt for people who are lazier than he is—a category that includes virtually everyone.

The first edition of "Atom Bombs"

MY AUTOPSY

There is a way
if we want
into everything

I'll eat the chicken carbonara and you eat the veal, the olives, the
small and glowing loaves of bread

I'll eat the waiter, the waitress
floating through the candled dark in shiny black slacks
like water at night

The napkins, folded into paper boats, contain invisible Japanese
poems

You eat the forks,
all the knives, asleep and waiting
on the white tables

What do you love?

I love the way our teeth stay long after we're gone, hanging on
despite worms or fire

I love our stomachs
turning over
the earth

There is a way
if we want
to stay, to leave

Both

My lungs are made out of smoke   ash   sunlight   air
particles of skin

The invisible floating universe of kisses, rising up in a sequinned
helix of dust and cinnamon

Breathe in

Breathe out

I smoke
unfiltered Shepheard's Hotel cigarettes
from a green box, with a dog on the cover, I smoke them
here, and I'll smoke them

There

There is a way
if we want
out of drowning

I'm having
a Gimlet, a Caruso, a
Fallen Angel

A Manhattan, a Rattlesnake, a Rusty Nail, a Stinger, an Angel Face, a Corpse Reviver

What are you having?

I'm buying
I'm buying for the house
I'm standing the round

Wake me
from the dash of lemon juice,
the half measure of orange juice, apricot brandy,
and the two fingers of gin
that make up paradise

There is a way
if we want
to untie ourselves

The shining organs that bind us can help us through the new dark

There are lots of stories about intestines

People have been forced to hold them, alive and shocked awake

The doctors removed M's smaller one and replaced it, the new bright plastic curled around the older brother

Birds drag them out of the dead and abandoned

Some people climb them into Heaven

Others believe we live in one
God's intestine!

A conveyor belt of stars and saints

We tie and we loosen

Minor
and forgettable
miracles

—*Michael Dickman*

was completed in 2003. With the publication of the book, which has since undergone several hundred revisions, Coster-Mullen became a leading member of the loosely organized scholarly fraternity dedicated to challenging the ethic of secrecy behind the atomic security state. Its dozen or so members included Richard Rhodes; Chuck Hansen, a computer programmer whose Freedom of Information Act requests helped him assemble "The Swords of Armageddon," a twenty-nine-hundred-page, seven-volume archive of documentary information about the U.S. nuclear arsenal; Howard Morland, who published the first detailed sketch of a thermonuclear weapon, in *The Progressive,* in 1979; and Carey Sublette, a programmer in California, who has posted a wealth of data about atomic weapons on the Internet.

Coster-Mullen fulfills orders for "Atomic Bombs" himself, by running off copies and then mailing them. (The book is available through Amazon, and costs $49.95.) According to a recent log of purchase information, "Atomic Bombs" is sought after mainly by people whose e-mail addresses identify them as members of the nation's secret nuclear archipelago: LANL, LLNL, SNL, ORNL, ANL, Pantex, Fermilab, the Hanford and Savannah River nuclear plants, the F.B.I.

"Thanks again for the great book," a nuclear worker named Lee recently wrote to Coster-Mullen. "As soon as I finish it, my son, who's on the 61 program"—maintaining the stockpile of variants of the original B-61 nuclear bombs—"will be reading it, probably in one of the assembly bays."

Many customers seem to enjoy thumbing their noses at U.S. security officials, who remain determined to keep the bomb's precise technical specifications a mystery. Harold Agnew, the former director of Los Alamos, recently wrote to Coster-Mullen, "The real problem with the security people is that they are basically ignorant and maybe just plain stupid. I guess if they just say no to everything they believe they have job security and won't get into trouble with their equally stupid bosses." Agnew added that he had suggested to security officials at Los Alamos that they invite Coster-Mullen to give a talk on how he did his research—"so in the future if there really *is* something they want to keep close, they might

"Luckily, our retirement funds are entirely in double lattes."

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have a clearer idea as to how to do it."

In March, 2007, after an extended debate within the community of civilian nuclear obsessives, Coster-Mullen's revisionist diagrams of Little Boy and the core of the Fat Man bomb were posted on Wikipedia. Accurate information about how a simple nuclear bomb is made, and how it works, is now available to anyone with Internet access. "Before 9/11, I found our government's emphasis on secrecy abhorrent," Richard Rhodes told me. "I find it even more so now." Rhodes considers absurd the idea that a foreign government or terrorist might build a bomb based on Coster-Mullen's diagrams. "Everyone who is sufficiently sophisticated in these matters hardly needs the help of us poor souls, who aren't even scientists," he said. Rhodes said of the U.S. government's classification efforts, "The point is to keep the bombs out of sight, to make us feel that the bombs aren't real, and that is John's real contribution. The notion that we are safer because we have all these bombs tucked away is a huge fraud."

Coster-Mullen is a man of rigid preferences. He loves Diet Coke, but under no circumstances will he drink Diet Pepsi, which he describes as having a sugary, chemical aftertaste that makes him feel nauseated. Even a teasing mention of Diet Pepsi can set off a rant that will momentarily eclipse talk of the bomb. Other subjects capable of replacing the bomb in his mind for short periods of time are his wife and children; the stupidity of Christian beliefs; the stupidity of religion in general; the prevailing etiquette at truck stops; and stories about rescued cats. The longest he has ever gone in my company without mentioning the atomic bomb is thirty-seven minutes, a record he achieved on a particularly beautiful stretch of road running through the sun-baked canyons east of Salt Lake City. To say that Coster-Mullen actually went that long without speaking about the atomic bomb is an exaggeration, as he referred to nuclear weapons twice in passing, and because he was aware that I was timing him with a stopwatch.

Coster-Mullen had agreed to drive us from Waukesha to Wendover, while I sat in the passenger seat of my rental car and asked questions. (I'm a lousy driver.) Research materials shared the back seat with a small cooler that plugged into the dashboard cigarette lighter and contained cheese, salami, and four twenty-ounce bottles of Diet Coke, which Coster-Mullen consumes at the rate of one per hour. When he finished a bottle, he tossed it onto the back seat. After two or three empties accumulated, he refilled them with soda from a two-litre mother-ship bottle that he kept in a shopping bag on the floor.

Soon after we had begun the car trip, we passed the industrial city of Beloit, Wisconsin. As a young photographer on the Beloit *Daily News*, in 1973, he was responsible for one front-page picture and five inside photos per day. He spent hours in the darkroom each week, and the knowledge that he gained about the technical side of photography proved indispensable when he began researching his book, and subjecting declassified photographs from government archives to detailed analysis.

Coster-Mullen's techniques for assessing the size and nature of objects depicted in photographs are familiar to photo editors, intelligence analysts, and others whose job is to glean detailed information from images, but they were new to the community of civilian atomic researchers. His first such intimate examination was of a famous photograph from July 15, 1945, of the scientists Herb Lehr and Harry Daghlian lugging a wooden crate containing a portion of the Trinity device's "physics package"—the plutonium part—to a car parked outside the McDonald Ranch House, a test site in New Mexico. A retired master machinist at Los Alamos, whom Coster-Mullen interviewed, had once measured the plug of Fat Man's physics package, and recalled that it was eleven or twelve inches long, and had been inserted into an aluminum sphere that was at least two feet in diameter. If

Coster-Mullen could figure out the size of the box in the picture, he reasoned, he could determine the maximum size of the object inside. "They're backing around the corner of that open door," he noted, gesturing at a copy of the photograph that I held on my lap as we drove through Dixon, Illinois—Ronald Reagan's home town. "The height of the box is in line with the front edge of the door."

There were distinctive-looking suicide doors on the vehicle, which made him think that he could identify the model, so he took the photograph to an antique-car dealer south of Milwaukee. Together, they examined the dealer's collection of Clymer manuals, which contain mechanical specifications for major American cars. American manufacturers stopped building cars for civilians after the 1942 model year and didn't resume making them until the 1946 model year, which made it easy to identify the car in the McDonald Ranch House photo as a 1942 Plymouth.

A few weeks later, Coster-Mullen was driving with his wife past an antique-auto show, where he found two 1942 Plymouths. "I showed the photograph and I said, 'I'd like to measure the height of that door,'" he recalled. "The photographer's taking that with a normal camera lens, and he's back about twenty feet from the car, so you wouldn't get any foreshortening. So I measure the height and applied proportional measuring. A is to B as C is to D. And it turned out that that box was only about ten and a half inches long. So, obviously, something eleven or twelve inches long couldn't even *fit* in that box."

Later, when we took a break at a truck stop in Iowa, he told me about another early discovery: a declassified report about the death of Harry Daghlian, who died of radiation poisoning at Los Alamos after he dropped a block of tungsten carbide onto a bomb assembly containing a plutonium sphere, on August 21, 1945. The report contained a photograph in which another physicist recreated Daghlian's accident. A ruler was helpfully positioned on a tungsten block, which allowed Coster-Mullen to determine that the plutonium sphere, which was identical to those used in the first atomic bomb, was 3.62 inches in diameter. All it took, he said, was a set of digital calipers and a little high-school geometry.

A few hours after leaving the truck stop, we passed by a town in Iowa called Stuart—a deduction I made upon seeing a huge white windmill with the word "STUART" painted vertically on its base. A road sign informed us that Omaha was ninety-three miles to the west.

"That beryllium sphere that you showed me yesterday," I said. "Where did that come from?"

"eBay!" Coster-Mullen replied. "It cost about thirty bucks. I bought it because it was roughly the same size as one of those polonium-beryllium initiators they used in Fat Man." Polonium is also readily available on the Internet, he said. He said that it was possible, though not easy, for a rogue figure to acquire material for an atomic weapon. "They proved in a test that you can use reactor-grade plutonium in a bomb," he said. "I believe it took place in the seventies or eighties, at a Nevada test site. Supposedly, thorium can be used to make uranium. Well, thorium was in camper gas lanterns. Oh, you'd have to have quite a few. Americium, which is the key element in smoke detectors, is supposedly a fissile material. But it would probably be suspicious, because you'd need to order about a million smoke detectors to extract enough material."

At midmorning, we reached the outskirts of Omaha, where we visited the Strategic Air and Space Museum, whose grounds are marked by a towering Atlas D ballistic missile. Energized by forty ounces of Diet Coke, Coster-Mullen ignored the SR-71 Blackbird spy plane hanging over the entrance to the museum and headed straight to the front desk, where he corralled a retired armed-services veteran who was volunteering his time. Smooth jazz played in the background.

"Do you have any casings of Little Boy or Fat Man?" he asked.

No, the veteran said.

By the time we left the museum, the sky had gone dark and storm clouds were on the horizon. As Coster-Mullen drove, I examined a scale drawing of Little Boy that he had begun drafting in 1995. When he had visited the Bradbury Science Museum earlier that year, he noticed that a diagram of the exterior of the bomb had been mislabelled; it placed a contact fuse on the nose of Little Boy. An archivist agreed to send Coster-Mullen a copy of the flawed diagram in the mail. Also included in the package was a partial diagram of the bomb's interior, a document that Los Alamos had never before released. The diagram revealed that a long gun barrel had been screwed directly into an adapter attached to the target case. This was the first piece of hard information that researchers had about how the mechanism inside Little Boy was actually assembled.

Not long afterward, Coster-Mullen told me, he read a coffee-table book about the Enola Gay. The text described Little Boy's gun barrel as having been made of wood, a suggestion that was clearly preposterous, and could have passed muster only with a publisher of art books. The book also said that the gun barrel was fifty-two inches long; the statement caught Coster-Mullen's eye, as it was virtually the only piece of specific dimensional information in the book. "I figured that number might be a clue," he recalled. "It probably came from somewhere else, since the author clearly didn't understand what he was writing about."

That year, the Smithsonian commemorated the bomb's fiftieth anniversary with an exhibition about the Enola Gay that featured the casing of a Little Boy. (Perhaps a dozen Little Boys were produced.) The bomb had originally been intact, save for its uranium, but in 1986 agents of the Department of Energy arrived at the museum and took the weapon away. Government officials were worried that a terrorist group with access to sufficient quantities of highly enriched uranium might commandeer the bomb, load it with fissile material, and set it off. The bomb was taken to an underground facility—supposedly situated in Los Alamos, beneath a McDonald's—where its insides were removed. The gutted artifact was returned to the museum in 1993.

A small number of visitors to the Smithsonian exhibit may have noticed that the bomb had been modified in a peculiar way. Whereas the exterior casing of the bomb had previously been covered in a uniform coat of dark-green paint, the surface now had a series of cryptic markings and numbers, including a "36" and a "52." The nose of the bomb was marked with what looked like a "12." Pictures of the altered bomb casing began circulating among atomic researchers.

When Coster-Mullen saw the "52" on the bomb casing, he immediately thought of the fifty-two-inch gun barrel that was mentioned in the Enola Gay book. The "12," in turn, made him think about a book called "Project W-47," by James Rowe, who was in charge of the bomb-assembly teams at Wendover, where the crew of the Enola Gay had trained before shipping out to the Pacific.

"At one point, Rowe gave a description where he looked inside the target case from the back end of the bomb, and he said it was bored out to two-thirds the length of the target case," Coster-Mullen recalled. "Well, the target case is thirty-six inches long, so two-thirds is twenty-four inches." The "12" on the nose of the bomb, he guessed, might correspond to the remaining twelve inches, which is where the front end of the physics package began. It was a typical Coster-Mullen moment: he treats the world's most destructive invention as an ordinary clocklike mechanism, made of simple parts that must fit together according to readily discernible laws.

He knew from other archival investigations that Little Boy's projectile was sixteen inches long. He realized that, by adding thirty-six and sixteen, he ended up with fifty-two—a number that almost certainly corresponded to the placement of the front of the projectile that would be shot down the gun barrel at the uranium target situated twenty-six inches away. He had figured out the essential geometry of the bomb.

Coster-Mullen surmised that the numbers on the casing had been written by whoever had been given the job of disassembling the bomb and removing its interior mechanisms. During the process of gutting the bomb and shipping it back to the Smithsonian, no one had bothered to wipe the bomb clean.

We were making our way toward Wyoming, through an empty stretch of Nebraska farmland. A hummingbird perched on a wire fence outside my window. A yellow school bus with no wheels was marooned by the edge of the highway. In the middle of a field, some inventive local person had used aluminum tubing to fashion what looked like a dinosaur skeleton. We drove by a herd of cows. "A feed lot," Coster-Mullen said, looking off to his left. A biotic stench soon vied against the pleasant fresh-leather scent that the car-rental place had sprayed on our seats.

As we drove, I paged through declassified memos from the machine shops at Los Alamos; these documents had provided Coster-Mullen with several crucial details about the bomb. I read aloud from a checklist used by Captain William Parsons, who loaded the gunpowder into the bomb. The various items—"Insert breech wrench," "Unscrew breech plug (about 16 turns, remove, place on pad)"—were meaningless to me.

"Sixteen turns is important," Coster-Mullen said. Learning the number of turns had helped him to gauge the length of the breech plug—which Captain Parsons removed in order to slip in the four silk bags filled with cordite that fired the gun that sent the uranium projectile smashing into its target. Coster-Mullen made his estimation by looking up the standard Acme thread sizes from 1945 in a machinists' book at the Milwaukee Public Library, where he got his first library card.

The subdivision outside Milwaukee where Coster-Mullen grew up was constructed for returning veterans. Everyone got a narrow lot with a nice back yard and a smaller front yard. His parents' house, built after the war, had a fireplace, a basement, three bedrooms, an upstairs bath. Coster-Mullen, who was adopted, told me that his parents' surname was Mullen. When I asked him where "Coster" came from, he gave me a sheepish look, then explained that he had added his wife's last name to his own. Hyphenated names are not exactly common among truck drivers, he said.

When Coster-Mullen was a child, he and his friends often spent Saturday afternoons at the Fox Bay theatre, a movie house with curved plaster walls, where popcorn was fifteen cents. Coster-Mullen loved the newsreels that came first, describing wars and new weapons and the conquest of space. He also enjoyed visiting his great-aunt's house, in northern Wisconsin. There was a little town square with a gazebo and a Civil War cannon. Attached to the side of the cannon was a metal box, and inside it was a brush with sharp steel bristles, which park workers used to clean out the cannon. It thrilled Coster-Mullen to reach inside the dark box and feel the brush pricking his finger.

The Milwaukee Public Museum was a twenty-five-cent bus ride from Coster-Mullen's home, and it was one of the best places in America for an inquisitive child to spend an afternoon. A generation of German artists had immigrated to the city and introduced the art of creating full-sized dioramas filled with cunningly imagined and finely worked details that took full advantage of the laws of perspective and the taxidermic craft. In a scene set in the Grand Canyon, a stuffed mountain lion was depicted in midair, ready to pounce on two mule deer. In a Pacific Northwest diorama, you could see a salmon drying on a rock, with giant trees and ice-capped mountains in the background. At the nearby Milwaukee County Historical Society, there was an intricate scale model that allowed viewers to gaze upon, in every direction, the chaos of the Battle of Gettysburg.

In grade school, John Mullen woke up every morning at six o'clock to watch a fifteen-minute educational television program in which scientists like Ernest Lawrence, who invented the cyclotron, stood in front of a blackboard and lectured on the basic principles of physics. His favorite teacher in high school, Darwin Kaestner, had worked at the University of Chicago during the Second World War, in a metallurgical lab that was part of the Manhattan Project. The lab was run by Glenn Seaborg, who discovered plutonium. Kaestner said tantalizingly little about his experiences. Coster-Mullen and Kaestner made a bubble chamber out of glass, in which they detected the movement of subatomic particles. Working as Kaestner's lab assistant, Coster-Mullen became an apprentice to a man who, two decades earlier, had helped to produce the initial quantities of plutonium that were used in the first atom bomb.

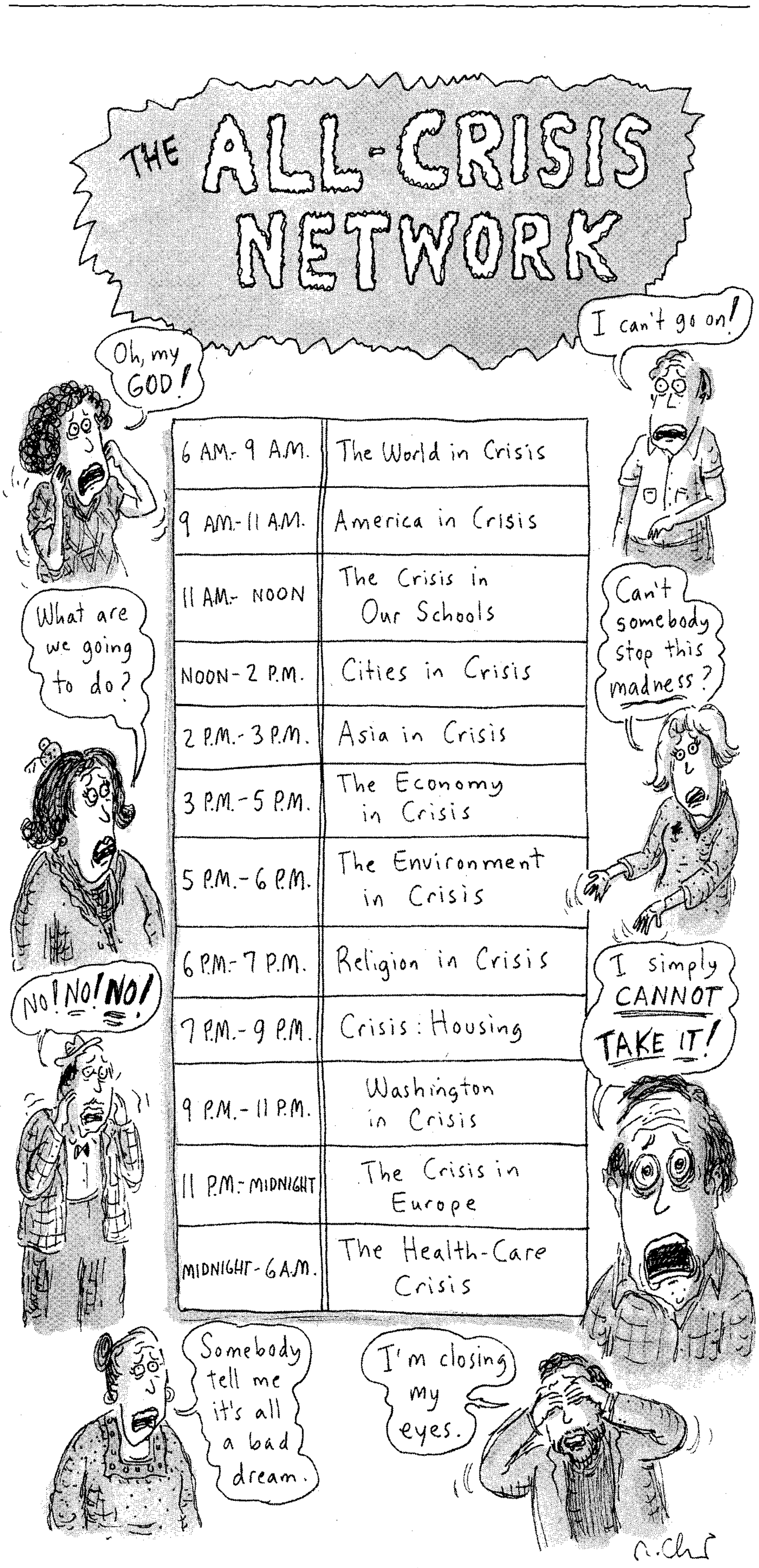
Coster-Mullen's next big breakthrough on Little Boy came in 1995, when he obtained a curved fragment of the tungsten-carbide tamper from one of the dozens of test units built by the Manhattan Project. An engineer had saved the fragment from the Anchor Ranch test site, in Los Alamos. The purpose of the cylindrical tamper was to reflect neutrons back into the critical assembly, thus containing the chain reaction for a fraction of a second, until enough matter was converted into energy to destroy Hiroshima. The tamper fragment was half an inch wide, an inch long, and two inches deep. It bore a notable resemblance to the State of Illinois.

"It occurred to me that perhaps I could get some dimensional information by analyzing the fragment's curvature," Coster-Mullen recalled. He took the piece to a friend's brother, who worked in the quality-control department of a large manufacturing facility in Milwaukee. "They have huge granite-block tables for making precise measurements of finished machine pieces," he said. A spring-loaded probe touched the curved surface at twenty different points. Thirty seconds later, a number popped up on a screen indicating that the original diameter of the tungsten-carbide cylinder was 13.1513 inches. "That was a *big* clue," Coster-Mullen explained. The diameter of the cylinder gave him a maximum distance of one inch between the cylinder and the outer casing. He was getting closer and closer to a full understanding of the inner workings of the atomic bomb.

We had driven more than nine hundred miles and been on the road for about sixteen hours. As we approached Scott's Bluff, Nebraska, the clouds, set against a cornflower-blue sky, seemed to glow from inside with a pale, marvellous light. A tanker truck was on the road ahead of us, passing a field of wind turbines. Behind the turbines was a freight train loaded with containers.

"You see how they are stacked two high, one on top of the other?" Coster-Mullen asked, pointing at two containers. "They put one on top of the other in the same clamp holes that would hold it to a chassis." The landscape rolled by his window, like an engineer's blueprint.

The initial years of Coster-Mullen's research were marked by dozens of small revelations about the bomb's mechanics. But, starting in 1998, he began to uncover the most tantalizing of Little Boy's secrets—a finding that completely re-


THE ALL-CRISIS NETWORK
Oh, my GOD!
I can't go on!
6 AM.-9 A.M. The World in Crisis
9 AM.-11 A.M. America in Crisis
11 AM.- NOON The Crisis in Our Schools
NOON-2 P.M. Cities in Crisis
2 P.M.-3 P.M. Asia in Crisis
3 P.M.-5 P.M. The Economy in Crisis
5 P.M.-6 P.M. The Environment in Crisis
6 P.M.-7 P.M. Religion in Crisis
7 P.M.-9 P.M. Crisis: Housing
9 P.M.-11 P.M. Washington in Crisis
11 P.M.-MIDNIGHT The Crisis in Europe
MIDNIGHT-6 A.M. The Health-Care Crisis
What are we going to do?
Can't somebody stop this madness?
NO! NO! NO!
I simply CANNOT TAKE IT!
Somebody tell me it's all a bad dream.
I'm closing my eyes.

vised the received understanding of how the Hiroshima bomb worked. Coster-Mullen's discovery revolved around what might be called the "sex" of the bomb.

In the standard historical accounts, the way that the bomb's gun mechanism worked was by shooting a cylindrical "male" uranium projectile into a concave, stationary uranium target. This act of atomic coitus created a mass sufficient to produce a critical reaction. The mass of the projectile was said to be 38.5 kilograms, and the mass of the target was said to be 25.6 kilograms. But no matter how many times Coster-Mullen did the math the numbers never quite worked out in a way that allowed the projectile and the target to fit inside the gun barrel while remaining subcritical.

The source of the error, Coster-Mullen recognized, was an assumption that every (male) researcher who studied the subject had made about the relation between projectile and target. These scholars had apparently been unable to conceive of an arrangement other than a "missionary position" bomb, in which a solid male projectile penetrated a vessel-like female target. But Coster-Mullen realized that a female-superior arrangement—in which a hollow projectile slammed down on top of a stationary cylinder of highly enriched uranium—yielded the correct size and mass.

The atomic-research community was initially dubious about Coster-Mullen's argument. But even Richard Rhodes, after examining the evidence, admitted that Coster-Mullen was right. Little Boy was female. (Rhodes told me that the drawings in his own book are "seriously deficient," and said of Coster-Muller, "He came out of left field and really did something that I think is pretty dazzling. He worked out a way to see through the ballistic casing of the weapons to see what's inside.")

Coster-Mullen said that his insight into the sex of the bomb was connected to a discussion that he had, in 1994, with an engineer named Harlow Russ, who had worked on Project Alberta—the code name for the bomb-delivery portion of the Manhattan Project. Russ was old and sounded shaky when Coster-Mullen interviewed him over the phone, and he refused to answer basic questions about the size of the project's nuclear stockpile, or to say how many nuclear weapons he had manufactured. But there was one point that he needed to make sure was on the record. As Coster-Mullen recalls it, "In the middle of the interview, he just blurts out, 'You know the projectile was hollow, didn't you?' I said, 'What do you mean, hollow?' " Russ's description of a hollow projectile was at odds with the diagrams in every history book and every museum display about the bomb. At the time, Coster-Mullen had suspected that Russ was senile. But he stored the incident in his memory, along with an injunction from a Los Alamos archivist to "trust Harlow."

A year later, Coster-Mullen received in the mail copies of four file cards from the National Archives, which contained a detailed synopsis of an eighty-two-page paper that had once been in the archives but was withdrawn. The paper summarized on the cards may or may not have been, in turn, a summary of a longer and more detailed secret history of the Little Boy program. The file cards were also withdrawn, but not before they were copied by a civilian researcher who distributed copies to people he judged to have the capacity to do meaningful work on the history of the bomb (and who weren't likely to report him to the government). The four-by-six-inch cards contained vital statistics about the Little Boy combat unit, including when each of the bomb's major components was tested and the product numbers of those components. They gave the exact length of the bomb's projectile: sixteen and a quarter inches. The cards also indicated that the uranium-tipped projectile contained nine stacked rings of active material, with a total mass of 38,531.12 grams; and that the uranium target contained six stacked disks of active material, with a total mass of 25,616.44 grams.

"It didn't work out to my satisfaction, no matter how many times I tried," Coster-Mullen told me. "By now, I'm driving trucks, and I was all alone on the interstate with very few cars, and I've got my pocket calculator in one hand and a little sketchbook on my lap, and I'm writ-

Victoria Roberts

"Could our co-op secede from the United States and govern itself?"

ing down numbers and calculating the numbers, and finally I determined that Harlow Russ was right."

It was the end of the second day of our journey. We were now in Wyoming, driving in deep-purple darkness; high mountains were distantly visible, looking as if they had been spray-painted on velvet. "If you could see this in daylight, you would be even more impressed," Coster-Mullen said. His bladder was about to burst, he confessed. Over the past three hours, he had consumed three twenty-ounce bottles of Diet Coke.

There is an absurdity as well as a grandeur to Coster-Mullen's investigations. After all, a man like Harlow Russ, the bomb engineer, could have spared him thousands of hours of trouble simply by explaining how the device worked. But the men who built the bomb weren't talkers. They were proud of keeping secrets, just as they were proud of what they had done to defeat Japan. When the war was won, the country turned in on itself, in order to safeguard the deadly knowledge that the gadget-builders had acquired. We remain fascinated by the story of the bomb, in part, because it shows us who we were at the exact moment that we became the people we are now.

I asked Coster-Mullen what he thought about the fact that so many eminent historians got the story of the bomb wrong. "I now read everything with a jaundiced eye," he said. "People use my book as a source, they rewrite it, rehash it, and their work still comes out wrong. And, actually, I read their books and go, 'This is really good!' If I didn't know anything about the subject, I'd be raving that this is a really terrific book. It's easy to read, it's exciting. Absolutely! Sure! But it's wrong."

The next morning, we were in Wendover, the base where Coster-Mullen's replica of Little Boy was housed. We had arrived late the previous night, and checked into the Montego Bay Casino Resort. Coster-Mullen had woken up at five o'clock. "I don't sleep much," he told me. We got in the car and headed to Wendover Air Field, where *the crew of the Enola Gay trained for* six months. I shaded my eyes from the glare bouncing off the Utah salt flats. The sharp sunlight led me to notice a crack in the left lens of Coster-Mullen's glasses. When light hit the crack, it appeared as a tiny bright star floating in front of his eyeball.

The Enola Gay crew arrived at Wendover on December 17, 1944, on the forty-first anniversary of the day that the Wright brothers proved that men could fly. The bombing and gunnery range at the base eventually came to encompass three and a half million acres of desert, salt flats, and mountains, making it the world's largest military reserve. B-29 crews dropped hundreds of weighted bomb casings, in order to develop ballistics tables for the elephantine munitions that ended the war. By February, 1945, Wendover had more than six hundred buildings, and nearly twenty thousand residents.

Now the only sign of habitation in this atomic ghost town was a handwritten sign that said "Laundromat." Here and there, inside the sun-bleached barracks with shattered windows, I detected the sound of fluttering wings. The eeriness of the place was heightened by the unnaturally flat, bright sunlight, which resembled the light used on television shows to illustrate near-death experiences.

Two F-16 fighter jets disrupted the quiet. Coster-Mullen, who was slathered in sunscreen, drove us to the secure areas of the old base, near where the Enola Gay practiced its maneuvers. We parked next to two coffin-like pits in the desert floor. The wind sounded like the hiss on old-fashioned tape recorders.

Coster-Mullen climbed down into one of the pits, which were each six feet deep, twenty feet long, and twelve feet wide; they had once been used as loading bays for the test units. In preparation for bombing Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the pilots of the 393rd Bombardment Squadron dropped a hundred and fifty-five Little Boy and Fat Man test units in the desert, honing the sharp turns that they would need to escape the blast. We returned to the car and drove to two barely discernible concrete patches on the desert floor, where the bombs had been assembled, inside huts whose floors had been covered in copper and attached to grounding wires, in order to eliminate any static that might accidentally set off a bomb. When the war was over, the huts were disassembled and sent to Sandia National Laboratories, in Albuquerque, where they became the world's first nuclear-bomb-assembly factories. "There was also a circus tent that they used for a while," Coster-Mullen added, scanning the floor for stray bits of copper to stick in his pockets.

We walked over to a nearby enclosure surrounded by barbed wire. In the middle of it was a four-by-eight-foot concrete block that looked like an ideal place to sacrifice a sheep. In fact, machinists and engineers had used the block as an operating table for Little Boy. I walked across the concrete to examine the altarpiece of the atomic age. A large crack ran through it.

Our last stop at Wendover Air Field was the departure lounge of the small airport that serves charter flights from Salt Lake City. Past the security-screening area was a coffeemaker; next to it, cream and sugar were laid out in old Army helmets. Coster-Mullen's bomb was in a Lucite case across from the coffeemaker, next to a soda machine.

"This is a replica of the Uranium bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945," a placard read. "It was dropped from an altitude of 30,000 feet and exploded 1,500 feet above the ground." The actual height of the explosion, Coster-Mullen explained, was closer to nineteen hundred feet.

Up close, Little Boy is a comfortingly handmade submarine-shaped object, painted hunter green and covered with plugs and wires. Inscribed on the surface of Coster-Mullen's replica are the names of the Enola Gay flight-crew members, who signed it, in 2004, at a ceremony in Wichita, Kansas. When Little Boy was deployed, Coster-Mullen said, wires on top of the device were attached to a solenoid unit on the roof of the bomb bay. When the bomb dropped out, the wires came loose from switches inside the clock-box—the brain that told the bomb to drop for forty-five seconds before detonating. On top of the bomb were three green "safing" plugs, arranged in an L shape; as the crew got ready to drop the bomb, they replaced the green plugs with red arming plugs. Beneath were six barometric switches made in Delavan, Wisconsin, which is on one of Coster-Mullen's delivery routes.

I told Coster-Mullen that the bomb looked like something that he had put together in his garage. He agreed: "In today's terminology, this would be a garage bomb." I asked him if there wasn't something obscene about an exhibit that commemorates the incineration of ninety thousand civilians, who were among the last victims of a war that was pretty much over. "Well, there was no indication that they were going to surrender," Coster-Mullen said. He added that most of the fifty million people who died in the Second World War were civilians.

I asked Coster-Mullen why the government insists on classifying even the least significant details about this decades-old device. He shrugged. Actually, he said, nothing about the bomb is secret. He smiled and added, "The secret of the atomic bomb is how easy they are to make."

Coster-Mullen began driving home to Wisconsin through the verdant plains and mountain passes of the American West. It was late afternoon, when color contrasts heighten and objects take on an unusually warm glow; photographers, he noted, call this time the golden hour. He pointed to a clump of trees on a nearby ridge: "Look at the stand of trees by itself, illuminated."

Coster-Mullen seemed to know the history behind everything that could be seen from the highway. "You see those three crosses there, up on the bluff?" he said, pointing out the window. "There's some millionaire who pays homeless people to put them up." Still, there were things about Little Boy that continued to elude him. "Even the placement of where the uranium core is centered, front to back—that's still up for grabs," he told me. Nor has he accounted for the entire weight of the weapon; government documents have offered figures ranging from eighty-nine hundred to ninety-seven hundred pounds.

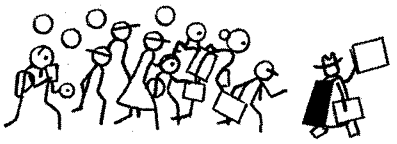
Tired and hungry, we drove for hundreds of miles and talked some more about the bomb. At one point, though, he changed the subject and told me about the person he admires the most: Gene Smith. "He was a photographer who used to work for *Life*," he said. "I wouldn't say he was exactly temperamental, but he had a specific vision."

One of the pioneers of American photojournalism, Smith is probably most famous for his photo essay "Country Doctor," which chronicled the practice of Dr. Ernest Ceriani, of Kremmling, Colorado. In the series printed in *Life*, Ceriani was pictured in a hospital emergency room stitching up a two-year-old girl who had been kicked in the head by a horse. "Gene Smith told what life was really like in America," Coster-Mullen said, when I asked why he admires Smith so much. "You would just sit with a collection of his photographs and wonder how could you have reached that exact point in three-dimensional space to make that image of somewhere so ambiguous and beautiful." Smith was famous for his fights with editors; everyone who ever worked with Gene Smith described him as a pain in the ass. But his photographs helped redefine the way that Americans see.

"One in particular, I remember, was a black-and-white photograph that he took in Japan," Coster-Mullen said, as we drove through the darkness. "On the left side of the photo was the sweep of a passenger train with the engine off in the distance, and the cars running out of the frame. The remainder of the photograph was a rural scene with two Japanese farmers talking to each other in the middle of a very white roadway."

What bothered and fascinated Coster-Mullen was the question of where, exactly, the photographer had been standing in order to capture two utterly separate moments in a single frame. Coster-Mullen said that he used to wonder: "Was he standing on a bridge, or up on a berm or an embankment? Was he photographing just the train, and then he happened to notice the two farmers? Or was he concentrating on the perfect composition of these two people communicating with each other, and the train just happened to go by at that exact moment?" He was in his early twenties at the time, and just starting his career as a photographer. The question of where Gene Smith stood nagged at him.

In the late sixties, Coster-Mullen got to spend a day with Smith, when he visited the University of Wisconsin. "I asked him respectfully about how he had created that particular photograph. He told me, 'It was simple. I was on the train.' "



Coster-Mullen recently had a chance to put his research to the test. In May, he flew to London to examine the Imperial War Museum's version of Little Boy—which he believed to be the only version of the bomb that had not been gutted by the Department of Energy. During a long correspondence with the museum staff, Coster-Mullen had portrayed himself as a kindly, unaffiliated researcher who wanted to take a few measurements for an independent history of the atom bomb. He was careful not to tell them that the Department of Energy had disembowelled the four Little Boys available for public display in the U.S.

Accompanied by his son, Jason, who works on secure-communications equipment for the Iraqi government, in Baghdad, Coster-Mullen and I turned up at 7:30 A.M. at the museum, which once housed Bedlam, the old lunatic asylum. We waited outside, next to a section of the Berlin Wall, for the museum staff to arrive. (The museum opens to the public at ten.) In Coster-Mullen's hand was a soft-sided briefcase that contained a folder with black-and-white photographs of bomb parts from his book, along with five photocopies of a cross-section diagram of the bomb ("in case I fuck one up") and a device that Coster-Mullen called the Gizmo—a modified version of a SeeSnake digital camera, which resembles the flexible metal probe used by plumbers to clear blocked drains. Coster-Mullen had modified the business end of the SeeSnake with a tiny homemade ruler; he had also outfitted it with a foam mount that would let him shoot video with a Canon pocket camera. It was easy to see why his work is addictive. With each new bit of information, Coster-Mullen was edging closer to cracking the code—"like a safecracker listening to those little clicks," as he put it.

Coster-Mullen kept up an easy patter with the museum curator as we walked past the old rockets, guns, and tanks on display. He casually extracted a pen that a museum staffer had stuffed into the open bolt hole in the nose of the bomb case, in order to block visitors from peeking inside. Then he began quoting facts and figures about the weapon, with the dual aim of authenticating his status as a bomb expert and convincing the museum director that he was a harmless bore. The curator, a stolid Northerner, gamely stayed with Coster-Mullen for an hour. I sidled up to Jason and asked him how he deals with his father's fire-hose-like intensity. "I try to curb it, but that usually doesn't work," he said, with good humor. Coster-Mullen's wife and children appear to have little interest in the mechanics of the first atom bombs; it is easy to come away with the impression that they see John's profound engagement with his favorite subject as a waste of time, a pose that on later examination seems like a Midwestern way of showing pride in his accomplishments while guarding against the possibility of a swelled head.

Coster-Mullen ran his tape measure in and out of the bolt hole and across the bomb's surface, for comparison with the mysterious numbers on the gutted bomb that had been returned to the Smithsonian. "What the hell are these slots? That's a new wrinkle!" Coster-Mullen said, peering through the SeeSnake into the bomb's innards. "Hey, Jason, put a piece of white tape right at that point," he instructed his son. The museum director politely stifled a yawn, then left.

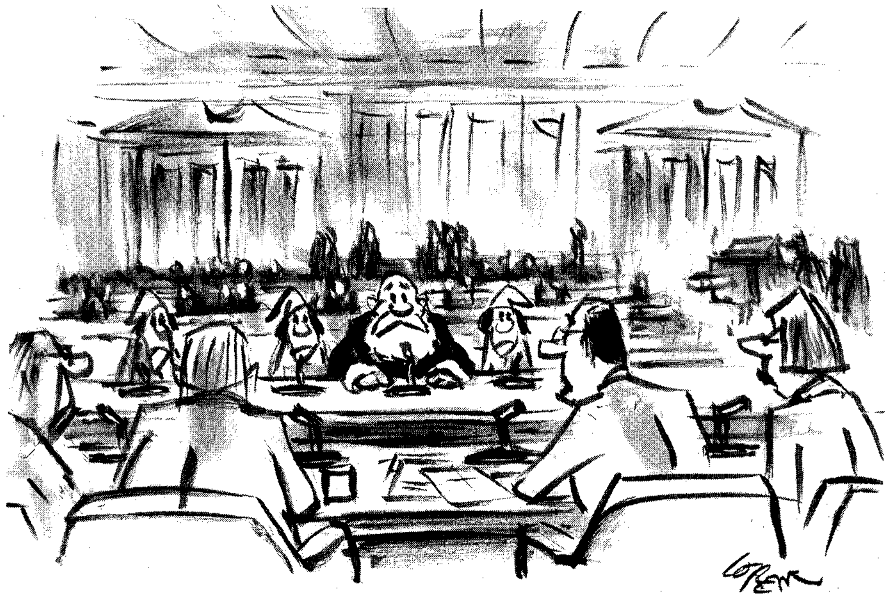
Coster-Mullen relaxed, and started rubbing his hands together and mumbling with fervor. "Aha, look at that, here are the vents," he said, pointing to four of them. "Now watch me rotate it," he went on, moving the SeeSnake around, and letting me peer inside the bomb. "So that's how they did that!" he said more than once. The bomb gives up its secrets reluctantly. What Coster-Mullen had found was not the holy grail of an intact target block that he had been hoping for. But it was a significant discovery nonetheless: the gun barrel had been configured to vent the air displaced by the hollow uranium projectile when it was fired toward its target. "I suspected there were vents, but I didn't know how they were configured," he said. "This is totally off the wall! This will shake them."

The Imperial War Museum's bomb was now covered in numbered tape, and surrounded by black-and-white photographs, sectional diagrams, and homemade tools. With visitors already trickling in, Coster-Mullen took out a clean cross-section diagram and began to inscribe his new discoveries. "Nobody knows about the position of the vents," he told me. The four vents beyond the gun tube were "the last big thing I've been dying to see. I can't tell you how many times I've disassembled the bomb in my dreams."

Human beings are proud of what they create—no matter how controversial or deadly. Edward Teller revealed the essential secrets of the hydrogen bomb in a popular encyclopedia article. In 1995, Robert Henderson, the chief engineer for the Manhattan Project, sent back to Coster-Mullen an early version of the "Atom Bombs" manuscript, with comments such as "shit" and "pure shit," and then went on to explain the exact (and still classified) process by which engineers made the lens molds that cast the explosives that squeezed the core of Fat Man until it achieved critical mass. Reading through President Truman's diaries, at the Truman Library, in Independence, Missouri, Coster-Mullen found an entry dated July 25, 1945, in which the President marvelled that "13 pounds of the explosive" had made the shot tower at Alamogordo, New Mexico, disappear—a pretty accurate estimate of the amount of nuclear material contained in Fat Man.

Coster-Mullen's research project can be construed as a danger to mankind or as a useless antiquarian endeavor. Given that a functional atomic weapon can be constructed in myriad ways, why does it matter precisely how the first bomb worked? Yet Coster-Mullen is proud to have helped establish "a public, permanent record of the facts" about the Manhattan Project. As maddening as his personality can be, it is hard to imagine what America would look like without the small and shrinking number of people who engage in painstaking, firsthand research in order to separate the truth from the body of supposed facts, and who keep the rest of us honest. A corollary of this insight, of course, is that much of what we think we know is wrong.

Coster-Mullen is still trying to figure out more about the bomb, and the U.S. government has little interest in helping him. The knowledge that his bomb will always be a partial and imaginative construction—that it can only asymptotically approach the actual bomb dropped on Hiroshima—is, at times, difficult for him to accept. "Nobody is ever going to take me over to Los Alamos and say, 'O.K., you can play with it,' " he said, wistfully. "I want to know. But it will never happen." ♦



"It is the consensus of this committee that you return with your request in two weeks along with a comprehensive restructuring plan."

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Slide show: The first atomic bombs.

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PROFILES

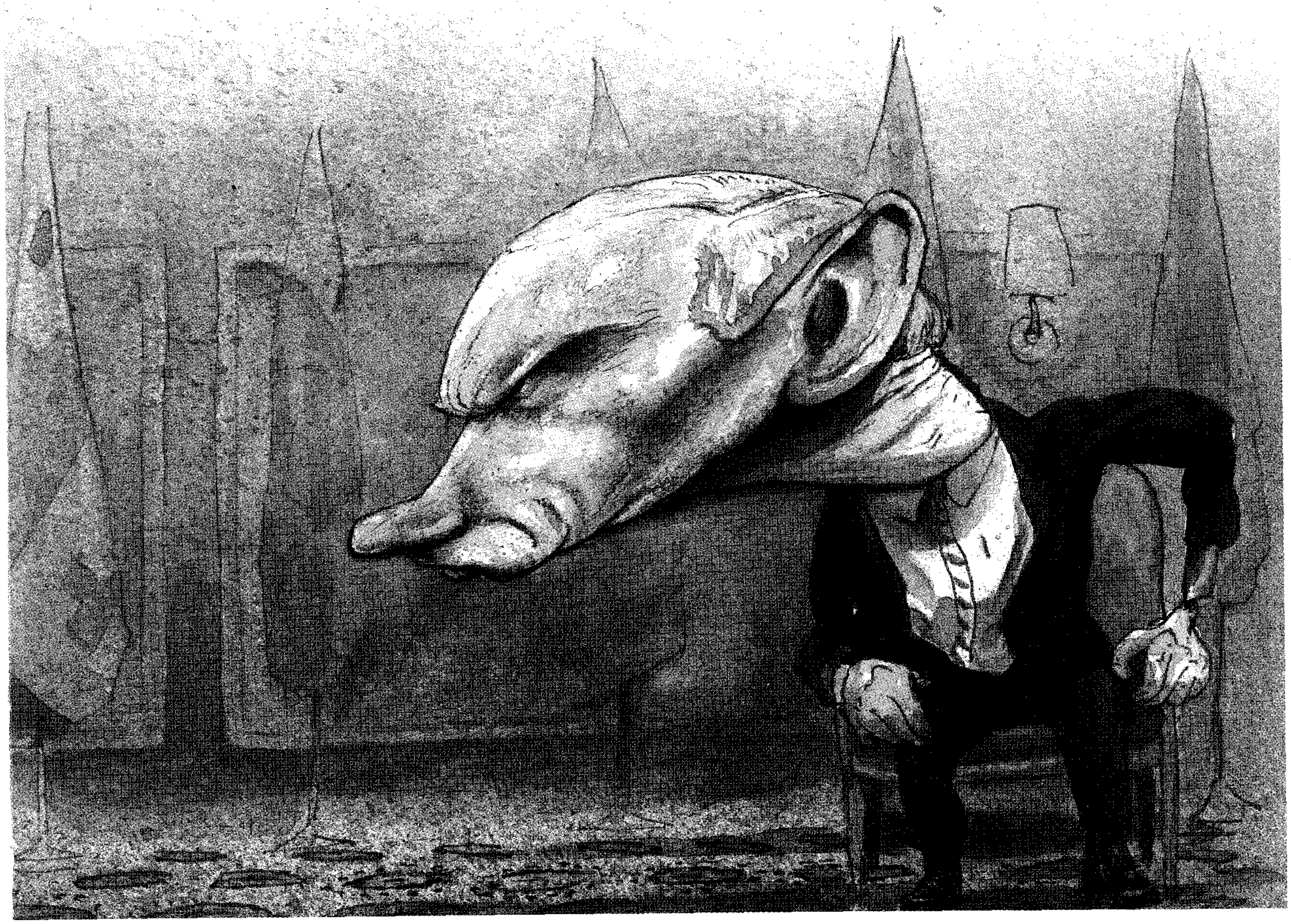
MARCHING THROUGH GEORGIA

Has Mikheil Saakashvili overreached?

BY WENDELL STEAVENSON

Mikheil Saakashvili, the President of Georgia, keeps late hours. During and after Georgia's five-day war with Russia this August over the breakaway region of South Ossetia, he spent long days receiving Western dignitaries—Condoleezza Rice, Dick Cheney, Joe Biden, Nicolas Sarkozy, Angela Merkel—and he spent his nights rallying foreign journalists to Georgia's side, often until the early hours of the morning. When I went to see him, at his office in Georgia's new, unfinished Chancellery building, in the capital, Tbilisi, I was told to arrive "sometime after midnight." Saakashvili's adviser Daniel Kunin, an American in his late thirties whose salary, until recently, was paid by the United States Agency for International Development, was there to meet me. Kunin is blond, boyish-looking, and usually cheerful, but his eyes were bloodshot. "I'm afraid it's going to be a little wait," he said.

Saakashvili's office is lined with icons of Georgian Orthodox saints and bookshelves containing biographies of Stalin and the Kennedy family. On a side table is a history of the Winter War of 1939-40, in which greatly outnumbered Finnish forces thwarted a Soviet attempt to annex their country. Saakashvili entered the office after 2 A.M., wearing a dark suit and a loosened tie. He is forty years old—he was thirty-six when he became President, after leading Georgia's Rose Revolution as a charismatic young democratic hero who, with a flower in his hand, confronted Georgia's post-Soviet leader. He is known to all as Misha. Nearly six feet four, he has a lumbering gait, and his bulk and restless energy lend a curious awkwardness to his movements. "He can't sit still," one Georgian journalist told me. "There used to be a joke about it: people would take bets on how long he would sit down for—ten minutes, twelve minutes."



"There is an A.F.P. story saying that Condi Rice will announce on Thursday certain measures," Saakashvili said to Kunin. Saakashvili has staked his country's security on its close relationship with the United States, and he had been hoping that the Bush Administration would take action against Russia for sending its forces into Georgia.

"Yeah," Kunin said. "I don't know what they are going to say, though."

"They are going to bomb! From Alaska!" Saakashvili said, smiling. (Governor Sarah Palin had been chosen as John McCain's running mate two weeks earlier.) "Or they are going to shoot their mooses!" Saakashvili asked an aide to bring a bottle of Georgian Saperavi wine and said that he hoped my story wouldn't turn out to be "an obituary." In August, Russia's Prime Minister, Vladimir Putin, reportedly told President Nicolas Sarkozy, of France, that he wanted to see Saakashvili hanged "by the balls." (To which Saakashvili replies, "He would not have enough rope.")

The animosity between Saakashvili and Putin made the summer war look intensely personal. "People who have been in the room when Putin and Saakashvili have been together tell me that it has been electric with hatred," Richard Holbrooke, the former Ambassador to the United Nations, told me. "It's about a tiny man from the big country and a big man from the tiny country." (Putin is about five feet six. He is said to have been particularly annoyed to hear his Tbilisi nickname, Lilli-Putin.) When he first became President, Saakashvili said, Putin "was pretty polite, and more and more he would be cynical and aggressive. The Putin I saw in 2006 already behaved like an emperor." Putin, he said, never respected Georgian sovereignty. "Not only Georgia," he added. "He always said Ukraine was not a real country."

The Russians' "arrogance and their nastiness grew in exact proportion with oil prices, and with American problems in Iraq," Saakashvili told me. But as much as Saakashvili talks about Russian high-handedness, the affront is felt on both sides. There is a sense in Russia, Masha Lipman, of the Carnegie Moscow Center, told me, "that Georgia is this tiny country, with a population of four and a half million and a weak economy, who have been provoking them in an arrogant manner because they have a bigger guy"—the United States—"behind them, and that their leader has been emboldened to talk arrogantly in this way." The summer war, Lipman said, was seen as "a standoff against America, with the Russians victorious, as the Americans were unable to defend their client and ally."

Despite the Russian bullying of Georgia, most foreign observers believe that Saakashvili has been needlessly provocative. On August 7th, Saakashvili ordered a

Witnesses to encounters between Saakashvili and Vladimir Putin have described the room as being "electric with hatred."

strike on Tskhinvali, the capital of South Ossetia, after a week of escalating clashes between Georgian police and South Ossetian separatist forces, who have largely controlled the region since the fall of the Soviet Union. (South Ossetia, in the north-central part of the country, bordering Russia, has been a part of Georgia for centuries, but the Ossetians are ethnically distinct and have their own language.) Saakashvili maintains that the situation had become untenable, saying that he had received intelligence that a Russian invasion had begun, or was about to. He claims that he had no choice but to attack Tskhinvali—that it was either fight or surrender. The Russians deride this version of events, saying that Georgia acted as the aggressor, threatening the lives of Russian citizens in Tskhinvali and of Russian peacekeepers stationed there. In any event, the Russians reacted quickly and decisively, launching air attacks and sending columns of tanks into Georgia. The tanks rolled to a stop within twenty miles of Tbilisi.

Saakashvili seemed to be winning the propaganda war in August and September, as Western media and politicians denounced Russia's incursion and its disproportionate use of force. In recent weeks, however, Western observers (and plenty of Georgian politicians, too) have become more skeptical of Saakashvili's story. In late November, one of his former allies, Erosi Kitsmarishvili, who had briefly been Georgia's Ambassador to Moscow, said during parliamentary hearings that he believed Saakashvili had been planning to invade South Ossetia for some time. When I spoke to Kitsmarishvili, before his appearance in parliament, he complained about the sense of being under siege that he felt Saakashvili had brought on Georgia. "I don't want to live in the new Caucasian Israel," he said. "I'd rather live in the new Caucasian Ireland. They still have their problems in the north, but no one is scared." Saakashvili had dismissed his criticisms ("Erosi has always been all about the money," he told me), and his government denied the charges. Still, even those who think that Russia simply seized on a pretext to invade now look at Saakashvili's decision to attack Tskhinvali—an obviously provocative move, with no clear backup plan—and ask, What was he thinking?

Saakashvili's mind is capacious but digressive. When talking about the summer war, he darts from the history of Soviet policy toward minorities to anecdotes about generals and presidents, and from bits about phone intercepts to citations from the Washington *Post*. In one conversation, he described the beauty of the women in Georgia's mountainous Tusheti region ("They're all blondes"); the layout of Tskhinvali ("It has only three streets: Moscow Street, Lenin Street, and Stalin Street"); and the characteristics of Georgian tribes ("I have two ancestors: South Ossetian—half wild, impulsive sometimes, maybe—but I am also Mingrelian. Mingrelians are all about compromise").

"His mouth is like a machine gun," one of his advisers told me. A Westerner who has worked closely with him said, "After you've had a discussion with him, you need to lie down. You need a drink."

It was past 3 A.M., and Kunin was yawning. Saakashvili looked up and asked him why he had not brought any good news for him that day. Kunin mentioned the latest McCain-Obama polls, which were indicating a tight race. McCain has ardently supported Saakashvili ever since the two men met, in Washington, in the mid-nineties; he has visited Georgia several times.

"He told us if he gets elected he'll make his first official visit to Georgia," Saakashvili said. I suggested they might have to rename George W. Bush Street, the airport highway. Saakashvili laughed. "No, we'll call Tskhinvali New McCain or something."

Saakashvili's enthusiasm, volubility, and charm have helped him to cultivate American politicians in a way that has not come naturally to former Soviet leaders. (Kunin, whose mother is Madeleine Kunin, a former governor of Vermont, told me, "Really, he's just a typical Western politician.") Vice-President-elect Biden has also been a supporter, and visited Georgia in August. In some ways, the force of Saakashvili's personality has elevated his country's status beyond what its size would usually merit. One Western diplomat formerly stationed in Tbilisi told me that, though he was wary of Saakashvili's impetuousness, he understood his appeal. "Here's a little beacon of light coming from the Caucasus, a leader on the Western path of democracy and market reform who speaks impeccable English," he said. Georgia had come to represent a small spot of good news against the morass of Iraq and Afghanistan. The diplomat said, "We saw in him things we wanted to see."

Positioned on the southern slope of the Caucasus Mountains, which cut across the neck of land between the Caspian Sea and the Black Sea, Georgia lies along the ancient Silk Road, a route that has been partly retraced with oil pipelines. The country has long been a battleground for competing powers, and in the early nineteenth century it acceded to the Russian Empire, which it hoped would protect it against the Persians. But it stubbornly maintained its own identity, with its Georgian Orthodox Church and a language that is not Turkic or Slavic or Indo-European and is written with a distinctly curlicued alphabet.

With the collapse of the Communist bloc, in 1991, Georgia regained its autonomy but was immediately mired in a civil war and two separatist wars—in Abkhazia, on the coast of the Black Sea, and in South Ossetia. In 1992, a triumvirate of militia commanders invited Eduard Shevardnadze, who had been First Secretary of the Georgian Communist Party and Foreign Minister under Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, to be their leader. The Georgian forces were defeated in Abkhazia, and a quarter million ethnic Georgians were pushed out. In South Ossetia, tens of thousands fled, and the enclave became a "frozen" conflict zone, with an unrecognized separatist government, policed by mistrustful Russian, Georgian, and Ossetian peacekeepers monitored by a half-dozen or so European military observers.

Shevardnadze was elected President in 1995, and brought stability, but by the time he won reëlection, in 2000, Georgia had sunk into an era of economic stagnation and endemic corruption. In winter, there was sometimes less than four hours of electricity a day in Tbilisi. Many government salaries were the equivalent of thirty-five dollars a month. Police would stop cars to demand, often apologetically, two-dollar bribes.

Parliamentary elections in November, 2003, were seen as a referendum on Shevardnadze's rule; Georgians had become openly frustrated with the status quo. Independent exit polls showed the United National Movement, led by Saakashvili, then head of Tbilisi's city council, in front, with twenty-six per cent of the vote; the government party second, with nineteen per cent; and the rest divided among smaller parties. Somehow, though, the official results gave Shevardnadze's party a small plurality. Saakashvili and other opposition politicians led demonstrations in Tbilisi, a model of well-organized, tenacious but peaceful protest. (Ukraine's Orange Revolution followed a year later.) At the climax of three weeks of protests, as Shevardnadze refused to negotiate or call another election, Saakashvili and other protesters pushed through the doors of the parliament, disrupting a speech by Shevardnadze. Saakashvili, holding up a rose in one hand, cried, "Resign immediately!" Shevardnadze was hustled away by his bodyguards—he resigned the following day—and Saakashvili picked up his abandoned glass of tea and drank it. He was elected President in January, 2004, with ninety-six per cent of the vote.

Six months into his first term, Saakashvili told the *Financial Times*, "People compare my style with that of J.F.K., but in terms of substance, I feel much closer to Atatürk or Ben-Gurion or General de Gaulle—people who had to build nation states."

"But you can't miss her second-grade first-semester graduation!"

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Saakashvili was born in Tbilisi in 1967. His parents divorced before he was three, and he grew up as an only child among five adults—his mother, a university history lecturer; her parents; and her grandparents—in an apartment on a wide avenue in a new suburb of Tbilisi. When I visited his mother recently, we drank tea and ate raspberry cream cake in the same small sitting room where Saakashvili had grown up. She told me that as a boy he had "a lot of attention, and everyone somehow contributed to raising him." They were a family of professionals, but they were not part of the Soviet élite. "I remember my grandfather had a special coupon from some institute he lectured in," Saakashvili told me. "Once a year we could go and receive two Finnish sausages, five or six specialty sprats from Latvia, Finnish chocolate, and sometimes, if we were very lucky, a box of red caviar. It was a very humiliating experience. You had to stand in long lines in some basement of the Communist Party headquarters or whatever, and we were standing there together—these professors together with the drivers of heads of departments of the Communist Party." He had formed a clear world view. "I grew up with the idea, like all my generation, that the West was an absolute paradise and that we lived in an absolute hell. That was the identity of my generation."

Saakashvili wanted to travel outside the Soviet Union. He was fascinated by Western politicians—"I loved Reagan and Thatcher"—and, after serving in the Soviet Army for two years, he began studying international law at the Institute of International Relations, in Kiev. He was there as the Soviet Union fell apart. After graduating, Saakashvili worked for a while as a human-rights officer for the Georgian government and married a Dutch lawyer, Sandra Roelofs, within three months of meeting her, at a summer course on human rights in Strasbourg. Saakashvili told me that Sandra had wanted to go to Somalia on a humanitarian mission: "I told her that Georgia was as bad as Somalia, except there is some hope." Still, options for an ambitious young lawyer in Tbilisi during the early nineties were few, and in 1993 Saakashvili won a scholarship to Columbia Law School.

Sandra and Misha initially lived in Astoria, Queens, in a basement apartment whose landlord "always wanted to turn the lights out." Sandra worked at Cheesy Pizza for four dollars an hour. But within a year or so both had found jobs at New York law firms, and they moved to the Upper West Side. "Perfect, almost posh," Saakashvili said.

The following year, Saakashvili began working toward a Ph.D. in international law at George Washington University. As a dissertation topic, he chose *uti possedetis*, a principle in international law maintaining that newly autonomous states should have the same borders as they had before independence. The point of it, he said, in a clear reference to Abkhazia and South Ossetia, was that "illegal acts cannot produce results."

When he arrived in Washington as a

student, he was dismayed to find Lafayette Square, opposite the White House, full of homeless people and rats, and the nearby streets in disrepair. "You get a sense what different governments are," he recounted. "The road was really very bad, worse than roads in Shevardnadze's time. But because local D.C. government was broke—even if it was leading to the White House, who cares? There he sits, the most powerful President in the world, but he cannot fix the road!" He went on, "They call it separation of powers. Some people would call it democracy. I would call it inefficient."

Saakashvili never finished his doctorate. In 1995, Zurab Zhvania, one of the young reformers in Shevardnadze's Citizens' Union party, asked him to return to Georgia and get involved in judicial reform. His dissertation adviser, Thomas Buergenthal, a Holocaust survivor who is now a judge at the International Court of Justice, in The Hague, also encouraged him to return. Saakashvili recalls his saying, "Look, you don't have to write this thesis. Change your country and call it 'The Making of a New Country.' It will be much more interesting."

Saakashvili went back and entered parliament on the governing-party list. In 1999, he ran to represent Vake, a district of Tbilisi built in the nineteen-fifties and sixties, when Soviet architecture could still manage grand, high ceilings and parquet floors for the apparatchik class. "I was running against the very corrupt head of tax inspection," he said. "We thought I would easily win because I am young, modern, et cetera, et cetera. But we did some polls and saw he was ahead by a very large margin. So that was the first real election campaign in Georgia. The first billboards, the first negative ads—the first real political ads on TV. It was really a classical Western political campaign," he said. "And I won by fifty votes."

In 2000, Shevardnadze made Saakashvili his Justice Minister. Soon after, he stormed into a cabinet meeting trailing a TV crew and brandishing photographs of new dachas owned by various ministers. This move—audacious, self-righteous, and media-savvy—became a template for his future. He resigned, after less than a year, formed his own political party, and soon afterward was elected head of Tbilisi's city council.

As a young parliamentarian, Saakashvili made several trips to Washington with Zhvania, the man who had urged him to return to Georgia, and knocked on any door on Capitol Hill that might open. (Saakashvili grasped very early the importance of connections in Washington, and as President he has paid eight hundred thousand dollars to Orion Strategies, a two-man lobbying firm run by Randy Scheunemann, a close adviser to John McCain.) He recalled, "We would have a big map and tell them, 'This is America. This is Russia. This is Georgia. This is the pipeline. This is why Georgia matters.'"

God, I'm such a perfectionist.
Kanin

Saakashvili's first months as President were heady. Most of the police force was fired and replaced, and crime went down. Tax rates were cut, but revenues increased. Civil-service jobs were eliminated, and ministers accused of corruption were arrested on national television. In Tbilisi, one common criticism of Saakashvili is that his impatience to get things done has subverted the institution-building that should be the bedrock of democratic reform. "I've seen him do things that are right out of Giuliani's playbook, and I've seen him do things that are right out of Putin's," Lincoln Mitchell, a professor of international politics at Columbia who worked in Tbilisi for two years for the National Democratic Institute, an American nonprofit, told me. "It's like he has a good angel and a bad angel on his shoulders, and the good angel is telling him to do the right thing and the bad angel is telling him just to do what he needs to do to get it done."

By 2007, Georgia's G.D.P. was growing by more than twelve per cent. There were freshly laid roads, renovated schools and hospitals, new housing developments, and elaborate public fountains (including one that spouts to the theme from "Mission Impossible"). Foreign direct investment was about $1.7 billion last year, and there have been hundreds of privatizations. A foreign businessman who has lived in Georgia for almost a decade described Saakashvili's government as "libertarians," and said, "Milton Friedman would have been proud." He was skeptical about much of the apparent success, though. "Many of the privatizations have been untransparent, and those of the privatizations that have been transparent have met all kinds of obstacles," he said. (For example, some public utilities were sold to foreign-registered companies with obscure ownership structures.)

One adviser described Saakashvili's project as "two hundred Western kids trying to drag four and a half million Georgians into the twenty-first century." Saakashvili made liberal use of European and American advisers like Kunin, received early financial backing from the U.S. State Department and, indirectly, from the Soros Foundation, and included in his government senior officials with

ACTING LIKE A TREE

When I got to the party and saw everybody
walking around in Christmas costumes,
I remembered I was supposed to be wearing one, too.
Bending slightly, I held out my hands
and waved them a little, wiggling my fingers.
I narrowed my eyes and pursed my lips, making
a *tree face*, and started slowly hopping on one foot,
then the other, the way I imagine trees do
in the forest when they're not being watched.
Maybe people would take me for a hemlock,
or a tamarack. A little girl disguised as an elf
looked at me skeptically. Oh, come on!
her expression said. You call that acting like a tree?
Behind her I could see a guy in a reindeer suit
sitting down at the piano. As he hit the opening
chords of "Joy to the World" I closed my eyes
and tried again. This time I could feel the wind
struggling to lift my boughs, which were heavy
with snow. I was clinging to a mountain crag
and could see over the tops of other trees a few late-
afternoon clouds and the thin red ribbon of a river.
I smelled more snow in the air. A gust or two whispered
around my neck and face, but by now
all I could hear was the meditative creaking
of this neighbor or that—and a moment later, farther off,
the faint but eager call of a wolf.

—*Jonathan Aaron*

foreign passports (his first Foreign Minister was the former French Ambassador to Georgia, his current Minister of Economics is Georgian-American, his Defense Minister, until last week, was Georgian-Israeli), all of which contributed to the Russian sense that Georgia was a Western—and for "Western" the Russian élite tends to read "American"—proxy.

Saakashvili's ministers argue that their postmodern economic experiment was threatening to Moscow because it provided an example of what it was possible to achieve in the region without Russian sponsorship. But the economic reforms failed to help many ordinary Georgians, and the euphoria that followed the Rose Revolution was dissipating.

Levan Ramishvili, who works for the Liberty Institute, a think tank in Tbilisi, noted that unemployment in Georgia was eighteen per cent, and even higher in Tbilisi. Many of the reforms in health and education were poorly implemented or had not been funded. "We spend one of the smallest amounts of G.D.P. per capita on education in all of the post-Soviet countries," he said. Meanwhile, the defense budget had increased to a third of all government expenditure. "There's always another crisis that diverts political attention and resources or economic means away."

In Tbilisi, Saakashvili's government was increasingly seen as high-handed, ignoring common concerns and the rule of law. On November 2, 2007, fifty thousand protesters took to the streets—crowds that rivalled those of the Rose Revolution. They included the economically disaffected, those who believed the government had become corrupt, and others who were outraged by the arrest of Saakashvili's former Defense Minister on corruption charges; in the midst of the investigation, the former minister had gone on television to announce that he was forming an opposition party, and accused Saakashvili of ordering a political murder and of other crimes. (Saakashvili called those charges absurd, and the former minister, after a brief time in prison, retracted them.) A television channel, Imedi, owned by Badri Patarkatsishvili, a millionaire oligarch, covered the demonstrations live and urged the protesters on, broadcasting denunciations of Saakashvili's regime. When Saakashvili sent police to remove about seventy protesters who were camping out on the steps of the parliament building, Imedi broadcast what amounted to an appeal for reinforcements. As hundreds of protesters gathered, riot police cleared the streets with tear gas and rubber bullets. That night, the police stormed and wrecked Imedi's studios, forcing journalists and studio guests to lie face down on the carpet, and shut the station down. Saakashvili imposed ten days of emergency rule and claimed the protests were part of a Russian-backed plot to bring down his government.

Sozar Subari, Georgia's public defender—his job is to be a sort of civil-liberties ombudsman—told me that he had tried to intervene between demonstrators and police, only to be beaten himself: "My staff member said, 'What are you doing? He is the public defender!' and he also got one hit." The laws that Saakashvili had passed included positive reforms, but in practice, Subari said, political pressure on the courts and on judges had increased. "In reality, the prosecutor just moves his eyebrow and the judge knows what to do," he said. "The law has been adjusted for the comfort of the ruling party as if it were the reign of Louis XIV." He outlined several cases of police violence, confiscated properties, and businessmen harassed by tax police. Four years into a five-year tenure, Subari, constitutionally, cannot be fired, but he told me ("And this is how it always works in Georgia") that some months ago he got a call from an old university friend who insinuated that he should resign and take a job with an independent agency at a higher salary. "They could say I was resigning for health reasons," he said.

Saakashvili's American supporters tend to disregard questions about his democratic credentials. One Western diplomat told me that the measures against the demonstrators were not so different from those practiced in European capitals. But the numbers on the streets had shaken Saakashvili, and he resigned and called for early Presidential elections. Holding the election, he told me, was the riskiest thing he had ever done. "We were living in a city that just hated us," he said. In January, 2008, he was reëlected, with fifty-three per

"I got my DNA analysis back. Guess what—I'm a Hapsburg."

• •

cent of the vote, but he lost in large parts of Tbilisi.

One night this fall, I had dinner on the terrace of the Hotel Kopala with a member of parliament. He told me that before the Rose Revolution he couldn't have afforded to eat at a restaurant as nice as this; in terms of economic development, he appreciated what Saakashvili had achieved. But he spent most of the meal criticizing Saakashvili's arrogance, imperviousness to advice, and recklessness. He told me that a few weeks after the Rose Revolution he and a friend had bumped into Saakashvili, and the friend said, "You understand now you'll be President of this damned country. And you'll destroy us, because you are crazy!" Saakashvili laughed and said, "But I can always invent something"—he snapped his fingers—"and get out of a mess."

Saakashvili campaigned for President both times on a platform that promised greater economic growth but also made it clear that the separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia would be a priority of his Presidency. Georgians generally view Abkhazia and South Ossetia as an integral part of their homeland—the regions have long been ethnically mixed—and their return as a pressing patriotic issue.

Saakashvili did manage to regain control of Adjara, an autonomous region on the Black Sea along the Turkish border, in the spring of 2004. Adjara had been ruled since Georgian independence as a personal fiefdom of Aslan Abashidze, a former minor functionary. He decreed that all the houses in the capital, Batumi, should be painted white; tried to inveigle his way into a connection with Washington by offering Hillary Clinton's brothers an exclusive deal on hazelnuts; and pocketed revenue from the port and border trade. Abashidze was unpopular, but he was supported by Moscow. Saakashvili encouraged protests and imposed sanctions, hoping for a sequel to the Rose Revolution. As Abashidze was seeking asylum in Russia, Saakashvili went on television to proclaim, "Aslan has fled. Adjara is free!" Soon after this intoxicating success, he began to devote serious attention to the problem of South Ossetia.

In August, 2004, Saakashvili sent Georgian police into South Ossetia to shut down the market in smuggled cigarettes and gasoline that was flourishing on the border there. This move led to clashes between Georgian peacekeepers and South Ossetian militia. The Americans were alarmed. One Western diplomat told me, "They were stumbling into this mess, and I think there was plenty of fault on both sides." He said that he told Saakashvili to stop the fighting. "He got furious. He said, 'Damn it, we cannot afford to be in this situation,'" and he conceded.

Saakashvili told me that, back then, he had still hoped that he could persuade the South Ossetian leadership that a democratic, economically resurgent Georgia would be a better partner than Russia. "I thought we needed patience," he said. The problem, according to Oksana Antonenko, a senior fellow at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, in London, was that Saakashvili fundamentally underestimated the depth of feeling and hostility on the Ossetian side. "When he realized that he was not going to prevail by sheer charisma and vision for integrating with the West, he started to operate more and more in a pattern where he just didn't want to deal with those people who didn't like him—with the Abkhaz and the South Ossetians—and he created a kind of semblance and image, a Potemkin village of a peace process."

He also may have misjudged Russia's commitment to maintaining its hegemony in the region. "It's impossible to imagine a weak Russia in the Caucasus," Sergey Markedonov, of the Institute for Political and Military Analysis, in Moscow, said. "It's our tradition. It's not European, I understand, but it's really, really impossible to ignore it."

Saakashvili, meanwhile, strengthened his military ties to the West. He sent two thousand troops to Iraq (they formed the third-largest contingent there, after the American and the British, before being called home in the wake of the August war) and lobbied, with the Bush Administration's support, to be admitted to NATO. Three former Soviet Republics—Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania—have become NATO members, and even the remote possibility that Georgia might join them has infuriated the Russian government. Masha Lipman told me that in Moscow NATO expansion felt like "an encroaching force advancing closer and closer to what Russia regarded as its legitimate sphere of influence."

In 2006, Georgia arrested four Russian officers on charges of espionage; Russia expelled several thousand Georgian nationals living in Russia, embargoed Georgian exports, and cut air and postal links. A few weeks later, Saakashvili organized elections in South Ossetia's Georgian villages; Dmitri Sanakoev, a former South Ossetian prime minister and militia leader, became head of a new administration, to compete with the region's Russian-backed government. Sanakoev, with money from Tbilisi, built houses, clinics, and sports facilities, but many Ossetians saw him as a traitor and a puppet. Russia increased the amount it paid in pensions to South Ossetians and the number of Russian passports it handed out. There was often gunfire around Ossetian and Georgian checkpoints, and, this July, Sanakoev narrowly escaped an assassination attempt.

The sequence of events that followed is much in dispute. The skirmishes between Ossetian militia and Georgian police in early August appeared at first to be just another flareup. Then, according to the Georgians, the attacks on their positions intensified, and gunshots came close to some Georgian villages; attempts to engage the Ossetians in negotiations failed. "The Russians clearly just refused to talk to us, and the separatists refused to back off, which was very unusual," Saakashvili said. He concluded that this was "preplanned" to provoke Georgian action. (The Russians say that it was the Georgians who didn't want to talk.) Temuri Yakobashvili, the Georgian Minister for Reintegration, watched these events with unease and some confusion. On the afternoon of August 7th, he drove to Tskhinvali for the second time in a week. He found the streets almost deserted. "You know, it was weird," he told me. "In Tskhinvali, we discovered a completely empty city. You just had a bad feeling—there were no people on the streets, no cars on the streets. The city was sort of pregnant for war."

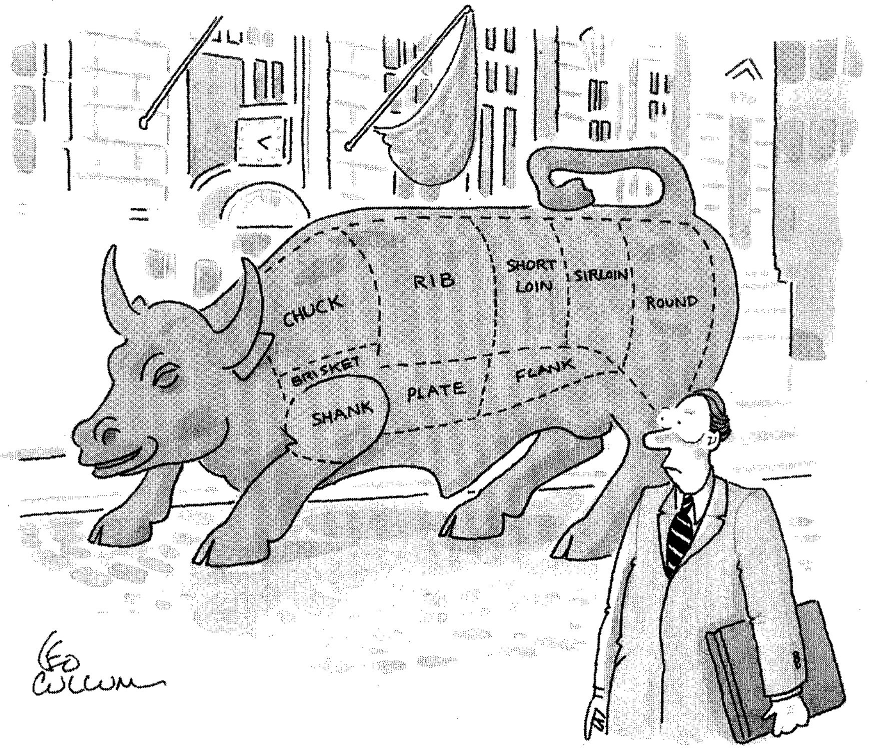
Yakobashvili told me that he met with General Marat Kulakhmetov, commander of the Russian peacekeeping force, who told him that the Ossetians were not under Russian control and suggested that a unilateral Georgian ceasefire might calm things down. At seven o'clock, Saakashvili announced the ceasefire on television, and offered an amnesty to Ossetian fighters and broad autonomy for the region. But, according to the Georgians, there was continued mortar fire from South Ossetian positions. (According to the *Times*, European military observers reported no sign of shelling in the area until the Georgian artillery began firing.)

Later that evening, Yakobashvili said, Saakashvili received a call that seemed to confirm reports of Russian units moving south through the Roki Tunnel, the only road between Russia and South Ossetia. He described Saakashvili putting down the receiver: "He got pale. I asked him what had happened, and he said, 'They're moving.'" Saakashvili asked Yakobashvili, "What do you think? Are we becoming Israel?" (Russian authorities say traffic through the tunnel that night was either an ordinary troop rotation or supplies for their peacekeepers.) Saakashvili told me that he had tried to call Western allies, but Bush was already in Beijing, along with Putin, for the opening ceremony of the Olympics. At 11:30 P.M., on Saakashvili's order, Georgian artillery opened fire on Tskhinvali. Rockets hit civilian housing blocks, South Ossetian government buildings, and the Russian peacekeeping barracks.

In the next four days, Russian aircraft decimated Georgian battalions; Russian tank columns blocked the main national highway, surrounded the port of Poti and Georgian military bases, and roamed the roads of western Georgia. The Russians presented themselves as the defenders of the Ossetians, but much of the world saw the conflict in terms of the Cold War paradigm of a Russian military threat. T-shirts appeared in Tbilisi with "Stop Russia!" printed on the front and "Prague 1968" on the back.

It is unclear what Saakashvili thought or hoped he could achieve by escalating the conflict so dramatically. The immediate effect was to turn the fight with the South Ossetians into all-out war and to pull in the Russians. On August 11th, Saakashvili ordered that there be no further resistance. Sarkozy intervened to broker a ceasefire, a six-point plan that required all parties to withdraw to prewar positions—although Russian and Ossetian forces still occupy parts of the enclave that had been under Georgian administration, as well as Abkhazia's Kodori Gorge. (The Russians say that they are there at the invitation of the Ossetians and the Abkhaz.) More than four hundred Georgians were killed, more than half of them civilians, along with more than a hundred and fifty Ossetians and, according to Russian military sources, sixty-four Russian soldiers. Two hundred thousand people were displaced; months later, twenty thousand Georgians remain unable to return to their villages in South Ossetia.

Privately, every Western diplomat I spoke with said that the Georgian attack on Tskhinvali was a mistake. They blamed Saakashvili's hubris and questioned the broader policy of provoking Russia. In some ways, he was lucky. The Russian reaction—which Saakashvili insisted to me



was "not a reaction but an action"—had the effect of uniting the Americans and the Europeans in condemnation. The long-term consequences of the debacle remain unclear. "I think everyone lost," Richard Holbrooke told me. "It's a Georgian loss because their economy has been heavily damaged and foreign direct investment has dried up, and now this credit crunch is going to have an adverse affect. I don't think Misha's position has been strengthened politically. Russia lost because it was their real objective to topple Saakashvili, and they found that they had alienated the West. And it revealed Russia as being very dangerous to their neighbors. And the U.S. and NATO lost because there was nothing we could do for a small democratic country we were supporters of."

In September, Saakashvili came to New York for the annual opening session of the United Nations. He was eager to shore up American support—a billion dollars' worth of direct aid had already been announced. I met Daniel Kunin at Rockefeller Center, where he was waiting for Saakashvili to arrive for an interview with NBC's Brian Williams. Kunin was happy. Transparency International had just released its new "corruption perceptions index," and Georgia's rating had improved from No. 79 to No. 67 in the world, well above Russia, which was No. 147. "It's a gift. I just added it into the speech," Kunin said.

That afternoon, Saakashvili addressed the General Assembly. He did not mention Russia by name, calling it "our neighbor," but he decried the threat to territorial integrity and called for an international investigation into the causes of the war. He professed his commitment to democratic values and promised a redoubled reform effort, a "Second Rose Revolution." After the speech, he went outside to greet a crowd of Georgian protesters holding up "Stop Russia!" placards and chanting "Misha! Misha! Misha!" Then he went back in to attend a reception hosted by President Bush.

After about half an hour, Saakashvili emerged from the reception and stopped at the bottom of an escalator to talk to a Central Asian president. The man shook his hand and left, but Saakashvili lingered. Just then, President Bush came out, accompanied by the American Ambassador to the U.N., Zalmay Khalilzad. Saakashvili approached and, in one fluid motion, put his arm around Bush's shoulder, shook his hand, and warmly greeted Khalilzad. The three of them rode up the escalator, chatting like old friends, until Bush and Khalilzad stepped toward a bank of elevators and disappeared.

Waiting for his car by the side entrance, Saakashvili was ebullient. He flipped through a copy of *Newsweek* with his picture in it and showed off his new watch: "Kenneth Cole. I got it in Miami." (Saakashvili has a penchant for watches; he buys several a year and tends to give them away when he gets bored with them.) He said that he didn't want to stay for the dinner after Bush's reception. "First, they don't feed you well at this thing," he said, "and then they sit you next to Mugabe."

In New York, Saakashvili kept his Secret Service detail busy. When he first came to the city as President, the Secret Service referred to him as "the Energizer Bunny." Saakashvili walks fast: heading to a meeting with *Time* editors one afternoon, he left a trail of staff members along Sixth Avenue. "Is this is a Presidential race?" his protocol chief asked, panting. He eats fast: two-handed, reaching for a second helping even as he is chewing the first. He talks fast, and in New York he talked to everyone from McCain and Palin to Henry Kissinger, George Soros, Ban Ki-moon, and Richard Gere. (The only person he missed was Barack Obama.) He gave interviews to NBC, CNN, the BBC, PBS, and Fox News. By the end of the week, he was joking that the only channels he had not appeared on were the Food Network and Animal Planet.

The morning before his speech at the U.N., Saakashvili spent an hour chatting with Bill Clinton. "It's amazing! I am not American—and that they would perceive me as one of them and that it's interesting to know my opinion," he said. "No European would gossip with me this way."

In the evenings, he went out until two or three in the morning. He likes parties: one night, he and his bodyguards crammed into a corridor at the Chelsea Hotel; another night, he went to watch the first McCain-Obama debate at a book party in the West

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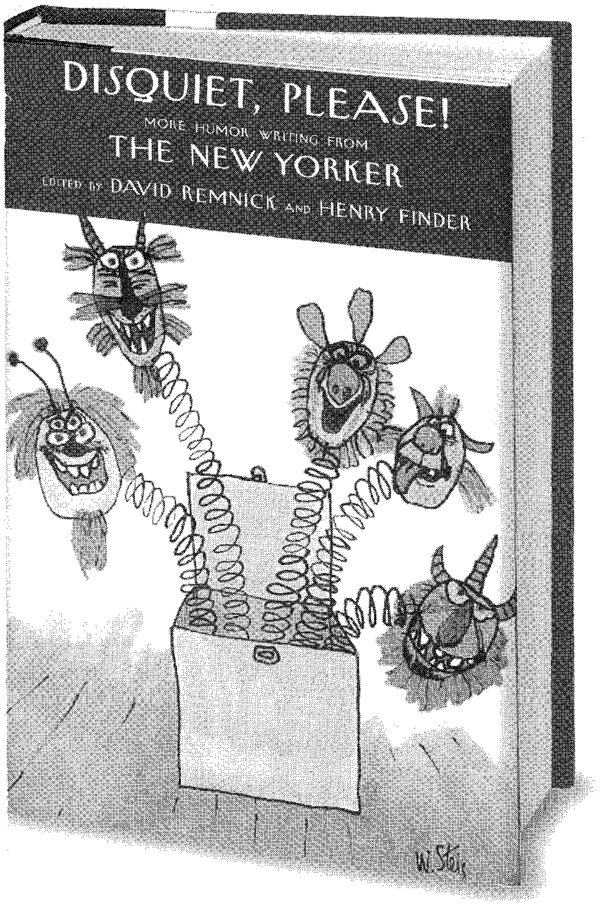

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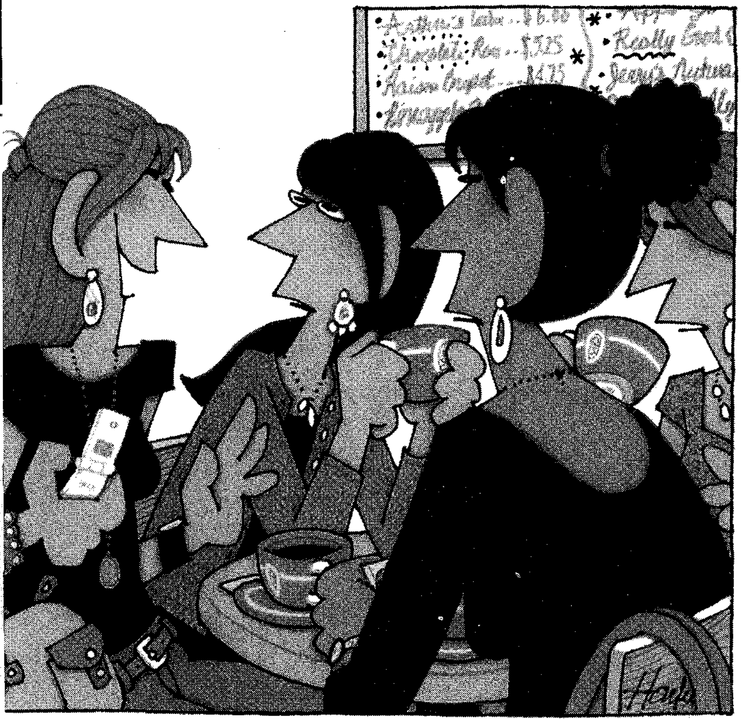

"He never calls me, but he always picks up."

• •

well, it didn't mean much
y. To get another hundred
ms to administer?" He dis-
ss of the territory that had
eparatist control: "So what?
districts of Georgia. It's not
are in a fight, and this is the
hting." The larger point was
Russian influence," he said.
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American Presidential cam-
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nts. "O.K., I led a revolution
people in Georgia, he leads a revolution for six billion. But I know, when everyone loves you, everyone wants to see in you something they want to see for themselves." Still, he worried about "this new trend emerging—telling Obama, warning him and the new people that will be coming into the White House, that Georgia and Ukraine are like this poisonous stock that you should drop, abandon."

He said that he had talked to Obama a few days before, and that although they hadn't gone into specifics, he found him well informed and broadly supportive. But, he acknowledged, an Administration preoccupied with the economic crisis might not consider Georgia a priority. "To give up Georgia is easy, because Georgia doesn't have a big lobby in America or some vested interests. It's all about how idealistic America can be."

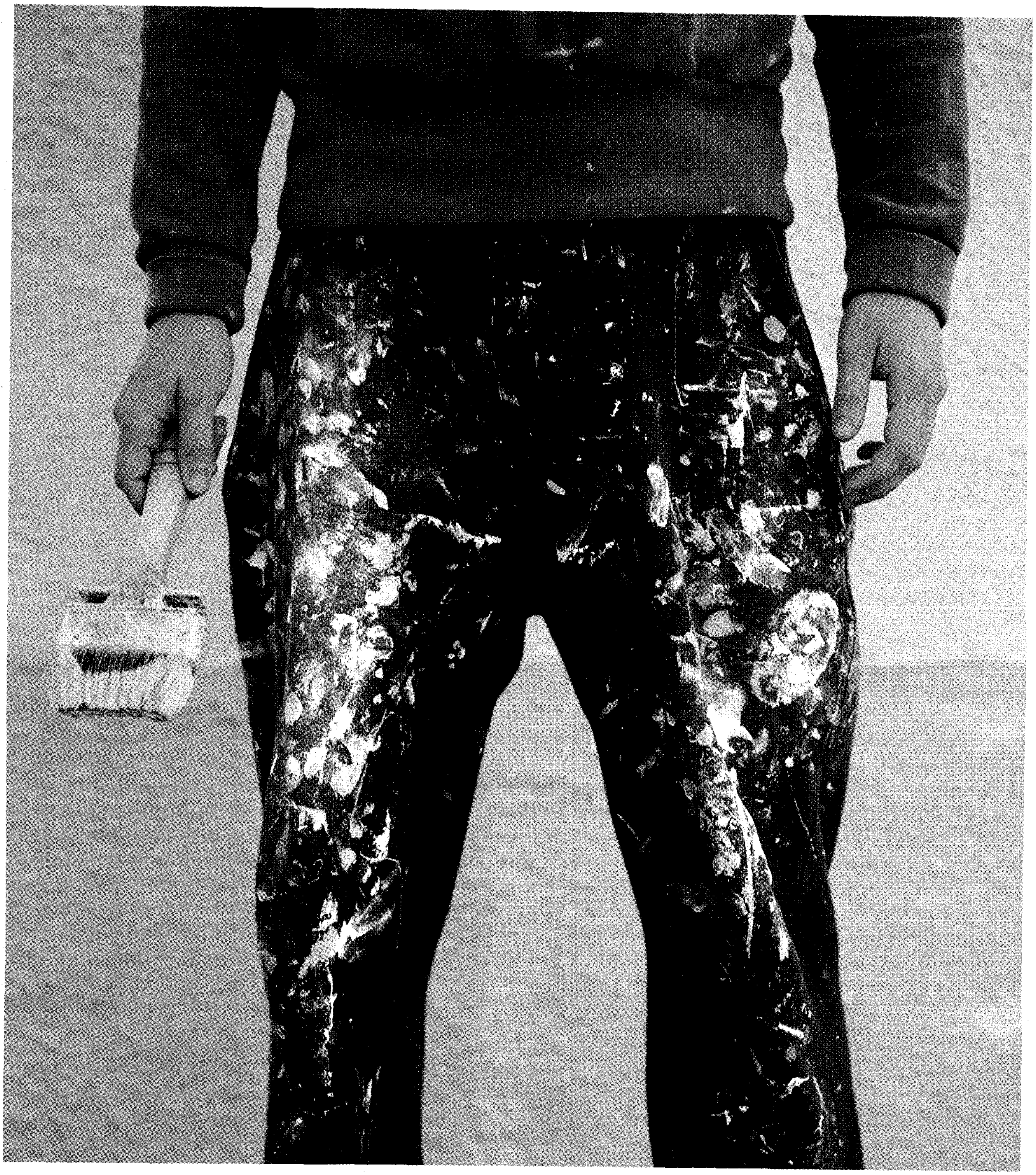
Earlier, he had told me, "With Americans, you can be yourself, and they accept you. I've never heard from Americans that I'm hotheaded, bossy. From Europe, I've heard a lot of this. Because, for them, in some cases, in Europe spontaneity looks like a dangerous thing." ♦

NEWYORKER.COM
Wendell Steavenson talks about Georgia.

FICTION

THE WOMAN OF THE HOUSE

BY WILLIAM TREVOR



"Well, there's that if you'd want it," the crippled man said. "It's a long time waiting for attention. You'd need tend the mortar."

The two men who had come to the farmhouse consulted one another, not saying anything, only nodding and gesturing. Then they gave a price for painting the outside walls of the house and the crippled man said it was too much. He quoted a lesser figure, saying that had been the cost the last time. The men who had come looking for work said nothing. The tall one hitched up his trousers.

"We'll split the difference if that's the way of it," the crippled man said.

Still not speaking, the two men shook their heads.

"Be off with you in that case," the crippled man said.

They didn't go, as if they hadn't understood. It was a ploy of theirs to pretend not to understand, to frown and simulate confusion because, in any conversation, it was convenient sometimes to appear to be at a loss.

"Two coats we're talking about?" the crippled man inquired.

The tall man said they were. He was older than his companion, gray coming into his hair, but that was premature: both were still young, in their twenties.

"Will we split the difference?" the crippled man suggested again. "Two coats and we'll split it?"

The younger of the men, who had a round, moon face and wire-rimmed glasses, offered another figure. He stared down at the gray, badly cracked flags of the kitchen floor, waiting for a response. The tall man, whose arms hung loosely and were lanky, like his body, sucked at his teeth, which was a way he had. If it was nineteen years since the house had been painted, he said, the price would have been less than would be worthwhile for them now. Nineteen years was what they had been told.

"Are ye Polish?" the crippled man asked.

They said they were. Sometimes they said that, sometimes they didn't, depending on what they had previously ascertained about the presence of other Polish people in a locality. They were brothers, although they didn't look like brothers. They were not Polish.

A black cat crept about the kitchen, looking for insects or mice. Occasionally it would pounce on a piece of bark that had fallen off the firewood, or a shadow. Fourteen days the painting would take, the young man said, and they'd work on a Sunday; then the cost of the work surfaced again. A price was agreed.

"Notes," the tall man said, rubbing a thumb and forefinger together. "Cash."

And that was agreed also.

Martina drove slowly, as she always did driving back from Carragh. More than once on this journey, the old Dodge had stopped and she had had to walk to Kirpatrick's Garage to get assistance. Each time the same mechanic told her the car belonged to the antique brigade and should have been off the road for the last thirty years at the very least. But the ancient Dodge was part of Martina's circumstances, to be tolerated because it was necessary. And, driven slowly, more often than not it got you there.

Costigan had slipped in a couple of streaky instead of back rashers, making up the half pound, he'd said, although he'd charged for back. She hadn't said anything; she never did with Costigan. "Come out to the shed till we'll see," he used to say, and she'd go with him to pick out a frozen pork steak or drumsticks she liked the look of in the shed where the deep freeze was, his hands all over her. He no longer invited her to accompany him to the deep freeze, but the days when he used to were always there between them and she never ate pork steak or chicken legs without being reminded of how afterward he used to push the money back to her when she paid and how in the farmhouse she hid it in the Gold Flake tin.

She drove past the tinkers at the Cross, the children in their rags running about, feet bare, heads cropped. The woman whom the noise of the Dodge always brought out stared stonily, continuing to stand there when the car went on, a still image in the rearview mirror. "We'd do it for four and a half," the man in Finnally's had offered when she'd asked the price of the electric cooker that was still in the window. Not a chance, she'd thought.

About to be fifty and putting on more weight than pleased her, Martina had once known what she wanted, but she wasn't so sure about that anymore. Earlier in her life, a careless marriage had fallen apart, leaving her homeless. There had been no children, although she had wanted them, and often since had thought that in spite of having to support them she might have done better if children had been there to make a center for her life.

She drove through the turf bogs, a Bord na Móna machine drawn up at the cuttings, an uncoupled trailer clamped so that it would stay where it was. Nothing was going on, nothing had changed at the cuttings for maybe as long as nine months. The lack of activity was lowering, she considered every time she saw, yet again, the place as it had been the last time.

She turned at Laughil, the road darkened by the trees that overhung it. She couldn't remember when it was that she'd last met another car on this journey. She didn't try to. It didn't matter.

The two men drove away, pleased that they'd found work, talking about the man who'd called out and said come in when they'd knocked on the door. All the time they were there he had remained in his chair by the fire of the range, and when the price was agreed he'd said go to the scullery and get the whiskey bottle. He had gestured impatiently when they didn't understand, lifting his fist to his mouth, tossing back his head, the fist going with it, until they knew he meant drinking. He was convivial then; and they were quick, he said, to see the glasses on the dresser and put three on the table. They were uncertain only for a moment, then unscrewed the cap on the bottle.

"We know about Poland," he'd said. "A Catholic people, like ourselves. We'll drink to the work, will we?"

They poured more whiskey for him when he held out the glass. They had more themselves before they left.

"Who was here?"

She put the groceries on the table as she spoke. The whiskey bottle was there, out of his reach, two empty glasses beside it, his own, empty now also, in his hand. He held it out, his way of asking her to pour him more. He wouldn't stop now, she thought; he'd go on until that bottle was empty and then he'd ask if there was one unopened, and she'd say no, although there was.

"A blue van," she said, giving him

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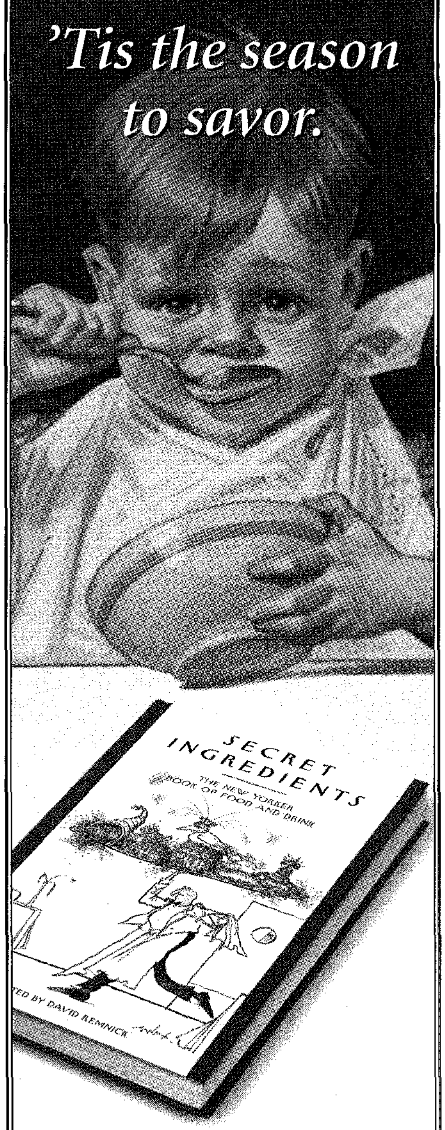

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more drink, since there was no point in not.

"I wouldn't know what color it was."

"A blue van was in the boreen."

"Did you get the listful?"

"I did."

He'd had visitors, he said as if this subject were a new one. "Good boys, Martina."

"Who?" she asked again.

He wanted the list back, and the receipt. With his stub of a pencil, kept specially for the purpose, he crossed off the items she took from the bags they were in. In the days when Costigan was more lively she had enjoyed these moments of deception, the exact change put down on the table, what she had saved still secreted in her clothes until she could get upstairs to the Gold Flake tin.

"Polish lads," he said. "They'll paint the outside for us." Two coats, he said, a fortnight it would take.

"Are you mad?"

"Good Catholic boys. We had a drink."

She asked where the money was coming from and he asked, in turn, what money was she talking about. That was a way he had, and a way of hers to question the money's source, although she knew there was enough; the subject, once raised, had a tendency to linger.

"What'd they take off you?"

With feigned patience, he explained he'd paid for the materials only. If the work was satisfactory he would pay what was owing when the job was finished. Martina didn't comment on that. Angrily, she pulled open one of the dresser's two drawers, felt at the back of it, and brought out a bundle of euro notes, fives and tens in separate rubber bands, twenties, fifties, a single hundred. She knew at once how much he had paid. She knew he would have had to ask the painters to reach in for the money, since he couldn't himself. She knew they would have seen the amount that was left there.

"Why would they paint a house when all they have to do is walk in and help themselves?"

He shook his head. He said again the painters were fine Catholic boys. With patience still emphatic in his tone, he repeated that the work would be completed within a fortnight. It was the talk of the country, he said, the skills young Polish boys brought to Ireland. An act of God, he said. She wouldn't notice them about the place.

They bought the paint in Carragh, asking what would be best for the walls of a house.

"Masonry," the man said, pointing at the word on a tin. "Outside work, go for the Masonry."

They understood. They explained that they'd been given money in advance for materials and they paid the sum that was written down for them.

"Polish, are you?" the man asked.

Their history was unusual. Born into a community of stateless survivors in the mountains of what had once been Carinthia, their natural language a dialect enlivened by words from a dozen others, they were regarded often now as Gypsies. They remembered a wandering childhood of nameless places, an existence in tents and silent nighttime crossing of borders, the unceasing search for somewhere better. They had separated from their family without regret when they were, they thought, thirteen and fourteen. Since then their lives were what they had become: knowing what to do, how best to do it, acquiring what had to be acquired, managing. Wherever they were, they circumvented what they did not call the system, for it was not a word they knew; but they knew what it meant and knew that straying into it, or their acceptance of it, however temporarily, would deprive them of their freedom. Survival as they were was their immediate purpose, their hope that there might somewhere be a life that was more than they yet knew.

They bought brushes as well as the paint, and white spirit because the man said they'd need it, and a filler because they'd been told the mortar required attention: they had never painted a house before, they didn't know what mortar was.

Their van was battered, the blue patched up a bit with a darker shade, without tax or insurance although there was the usual evidence of both on the windscreen. They slept in it, among contents that they kept tidy, knowing that they must: tools of one kind or another they had come by, their mugs, their plates, a basin, saucepan, frying pan, food.

In the dialect that was their language the older brother asked if they would spare the petrol to go to the ruins where they were engaged in making themselves a dwelling. The younger brother, driving, nodded and they went there.

In her bedroom Martina closed the lid of the Gold Flake tin and secured it with its rubber band. She stood back from the wardrobe looking glass and critically surveyed herself, ashamed of how she'd let herself go, her bulk not quite obese but almost now, her pale-blue eyes—once her most telling feature—half lost in folds of flesh. She had been still in her thirties when she'd come to the farmhouse, still particular about how she looked and dressed. She wiped away the lipstick that had been smudged by Costigan's rough embracing when for a few minutes they had been alone in the shop. She settled her underclothes where he had disturbed them. The smell of the shop—a medley of rashers and fly spray and the chickens Costigan roasted on a spit—had passed from his clothes to hers, as it always did. "Oh, just the shop," she used to say when she was asked about it in the kitchen, but she wasn't anymore.

They were distantly related, had been together in the farmhouse since his mother died, twelve years ago, and his father the following winter. Another distant relative had suggested the union, since Martina was on her own and only occasionally employed. Her cousin—for they had agreed that they were cousins of a kind—would have otherwise had to be taken into a home; and she herself had little to lose by coming to the farm. The grazing was parcelled out, rent received annually and now and again another field sold. Her crippled cousin, who since birth had been confined as he was now, had for Martina the attraction of a legal stipulation: in time she would inherit what was left.

Often people assumed that he had died, never saying a word, but you could tell. In Carragh they did, and people from round about who never came to the farmhouse did; talking to them, you could feel it. She didn't mention him herself except when the subject was brought up: there was nothing to say because there was nothing that was different, nothing she could remark on.

He was asleep after the whiskey when she went downstairs and he slept until he was roused by the clatter of dishes and the frying of their six-o'clock meal. She liked to keep to time, to do what it told her to do. She kept the alarm clock on the dresser wound, and accurate to the minute by the wireless morning and evening. She collected, first thing every morning, what eggs had been laid in the night. She got him to the kitchen from the back room as soon as she'd set the breakfast table. She made the two beds when he had his breakfast in him and she had washed up the dishes. On a day she went to Carragh she left the house at a quarter past two; she'd got into the way of that. Usually he was asleep by the range then, as most of the time he was unless he'd begun to argue. If he had, that could go on all day.

"They'll be a nuisance about the place." She had to raise her voice because the liver on the pan was spitting. The slightest sound—of dishes or cooking, the lid of the kettle rattling—and he said he couldn't hear her when she spoke. But she knew he could.

He said he couldn't now and she ignored him. He said he'd have another drink and she ignored that, too.

"They're never a nuisance," he said. "Lads like that."

He said they were clean, you'd look at them and know. He said they'd be company for her.

"One month to the next you hardly see another face, Martina. Sure, I'm aware of that, girl. Don't I know it the whole time."

She cracked the first egg into the pool of fat she made by tilting the pan. She could crack open an egg and empty it with one hand. Two each they had.

"It needs the paint," he said.

She didn't comment on that. She didn't say he couldn't know; how could he, since she didn't manage to get him out to the yard anymore? She hadn't managed to for years.

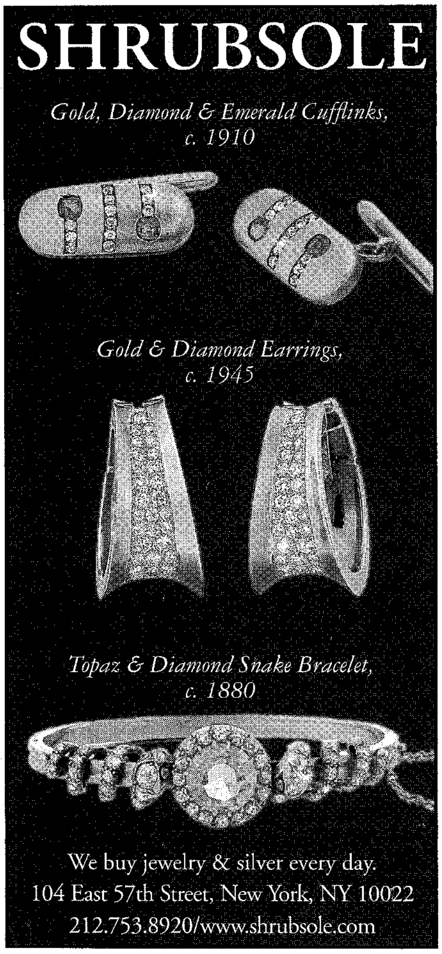
"It does me good," he said. "The old drop of whiskey."

She turned the wireless on and there was old-time music playing.

"That's terrible stuff," he said.

Martina didn't comment on that, either. When the slices of liver were black she scooped them off the pan and put them on their plates with the eggs. She got him to the table. He'd had whiskey enough, she said when he asked for more, and nothing further was said in the kitchen.

When they had eaten she got him to his bed, but an hour later he was shouting and she went to him. She thought



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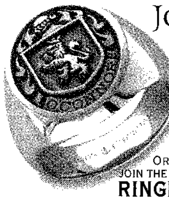

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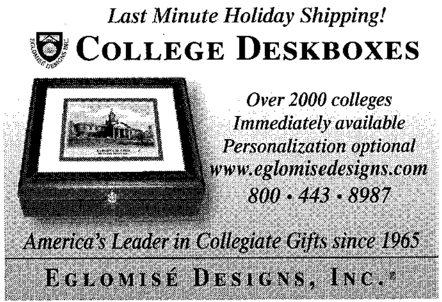

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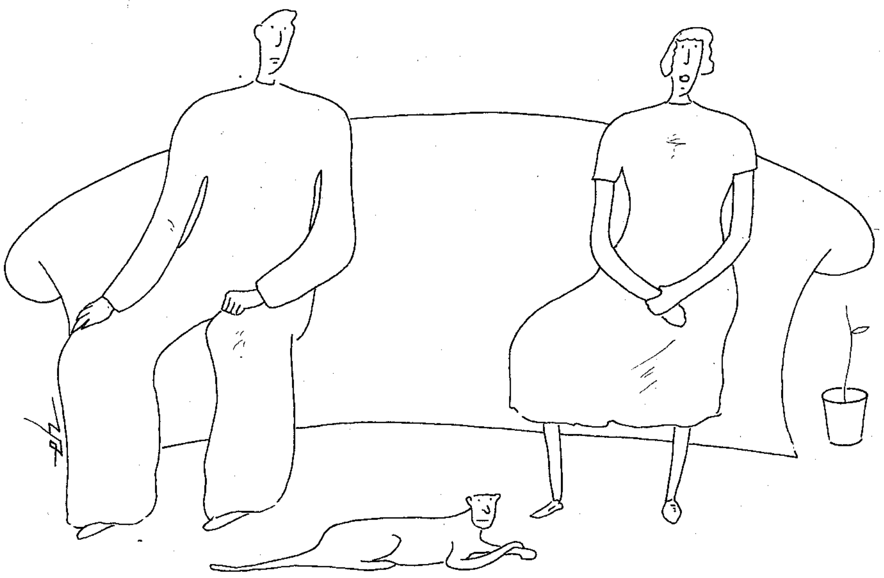

"When was the last time you had your sexual dynamism checked?"

• •

it was a dream, but he said it was his legs. She gave him aspirins, and whiskey, because when he had both the pains would go. "Come in and keep me warm," he whispered, and she said no. She often wondered if the pains had maddened him, if his brain had been attacked, as so much else in his body was.

"Why'd they call you Martina?" he asked, still whispering. A man's name, he said; why would they?

"I told you."

"You'd tell me many a thing."

"Go to sleep now."

"Are the grass rents in?"

"Go back to sleep."

The painting commenced on a Tuesday because on the Monday there was ceaseless rain. The Tuesday was fine, full of sunshine, with a soft, drying breeze. The painters hired two ladders in Carragh and spent that day filling in the stucco surface where it had broken away.

The woman of the house, whom they assumed to be the crippled man's wife, brought out soda scones and tea in the middle of the morning, and when she asked them what time was best for this—morning and afternoon—they pointed at eleven o'clock and half past three on the older brother's watch. She brought them biscuits with the tea at exactly half past three. She stayed talking to them, telling them where they could buy what they wanted in Carragh, asking them about themselves. Her smile was tired but she was patient with them when they didn't understand. She watched them while they worked and when they asked her what she thought she said they were as good as anyone. By the evening the repairs to the stucco had been completed.

Heavy rain was forecast for the Wednesday, and it came in the middle of the afternoon, blown in from the west by an intimidating storm. The work could not be continued, and the painters sat in their van, hoping for an improvement. Earlier, while they were working, there had been raised voices in the house, an altercation that occasionally gave way to silence before beginning again. The older painter, whose English was better than his brother's, reported that it had to do with money and the condition of the land. "The pension is what I'm good for," the crippled man repeatedly insisted. "Amn't I here for the few bob I bring in?" The pension became the heart of what was so crossly talked about, how it was spent in ways it shouldn't be, how the crippled man didn't have it for himself. The painters lost interest, but the voices went on and could still be heard when one or other of them left the van to look at the sky.

Late in the afternoon they gave up waiting and drove into Carragh. They asked in the paint shop how long the bad weather would last and were advised that the outlook for several days was not good. They returned the ladders, reluctant to pay for their hire while they were unable to make use of them. It was a setback, but they were used to setbacks and, inquiring again in the paint shop, they learned that a builder who'd been let down was taking on replacement labor at the conversion of a disused mill—an indoor site a few miles away. He agreed to employ them on a day-to-day basis.

The rain affected him. When it rained he wouldn't stop, since she was confined herself, and when they had worn out the subject of the pension he would begin again about the saint she was named after. "Tell me," he would repeat his most regular request and if it was the evening and he was fuddled with drink she wouldn't answer, but in the daytime he would wheedle and every minute would drag more sluggishly than minutes had before.

He did so on the morning the painters took down their ladders and went away. She was shaking the clinker out of the range so that the fire would glow. She was kneeling down in front of him and she could feel him examining her the way he often did. You'd be the better for it, he said, when she'd tell about her saint, you'd feel the consolation of a holiness. "Tell me," he said.

She took the ash pan out to the yard, not saying anything before she went. The rain soaked her shoulders and dribbled over her face and neck, drenched the gray-black material of her dress, her arms, ran down between her breasts. When she returned to the kitchen she did as he wished, telling him what he knew: that holy milk, not blood, had flowed in the body of St. Martina of Rome, that Pope Urban had built a church in her honor and had composed the hymns used in her office in the Roman Breviary, that she perished by the sword.

He complimented her when she finished speaking, while she still stood behind him, not wanting to look at him. The rain she had brought in with her dripped through her clothes onto the broken flags of the floor.

The painters worked at the mill conversion for longer than they might have, even though the finer weather had come. The money was better and there was talk of more employment in the future: in all, nine days passed before they returned to the farmhouse.

They arrived early, keeping their voices down and working quickly to make up for lost time, nervous in case there was a complaint about their not returning sooner. By eight o'clock the undercoat was on most of the front wall.

The place was quiet and remained so, but wisps of smoke were coming from one of the chimneys, which the painters remembered from the day and a half they'd spent here before. The car was there, its length too much for the shed it was in, its rear protruding, and they remembered that, too. Still working at the front of the house, they listened for footsteps in the yard, expecting the tea that had come before in the morning, but no tea came. In the afternoon, when the older brother went to the van for a change of brushes, the tea tray was on the bonnet and he carried it to where the ladders were.

In the days that followed this became a pattern. The stillness the place had acquired was not broken by the sound of a radio playing or voices. The tea came without additions and at varying times, as if the arrangement about eleven o'clock and half past three had been forgotten. When the ladders were moved into the yard the tray was left on the step of a door at the side of the house.

Sometimes, not often, glancing into the house, the painters caught a glimpse of the woman whom they assumed to be the wife of the crippled man they had drunk whiskey with, who had shaken hands with both of them when the agreement about the painting was made. At first they wondered if the woman they saw was someone else, even though she was similarly dressed. They talked about that, bewildered by the strangeness they had returned to, wondering if in this country so abrupt a transformation was ordinary and usual and was often to be found.

Once, through the grimy panes of an upstairs window, the younger brother, from his ladder, saw the woman crouched over a dressing table, her head on her arms as if she slept, or wept. She looked up while he still watched, his curiosity beyond restraint, and her eyes stared back at him, but she did not avert her gaze.

That same day, just before the painters finished for the day, while they were scraping the last of the old paint from the kitchen window frames, they saw that the crippled

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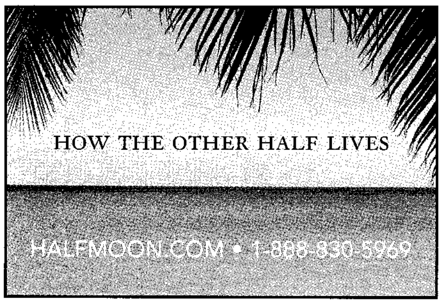
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man was not in his chair by the range and realized that since they had returned after the rain they had not heard his voice.

She washed up their two cups and saucers, teaspoons with a residue of sugar on them because they'd been dipped into the bowl when they were wet with tea. She wiped the tray and dried it, and hung the damp tea towel on the line in the scullery. She didn't want to think, even to know that they were there, that they had come. She didn't want to see them, as all day yesterday she had managed not to. She hung the cups up and put the saucers with the others, the sugar bowl in the cupboard under the sink.

The ladders clattered in the yard, pulled out of sight for the night in case they'd be a temptation for the tinkers. She couldn't hear talking and doubted that there was any. A few evenings ago when they were leaving they had knocked on the back door and she hadn't answered.

She listened for footsteps coming to the door again but none came. She heard the van being driven off. She heard the geese flying over, coming from the water at Dole: this was their time. Once the van had returned when something had been left behind, and she'd been collecting the evening eggs and had gone into the fields until it was driven off again. In the kitchen she waited for another quarter of an hour, watching the hands of the dresser clock. Then she let the air into the house, the front door and the back door open, the kitchen windows.

The dwelling they had made for themselves at the ruins was complete. They had used the fallen stones and the few timber beams that were in good condition, a doorframe that had survived. They'd bought sheets of old galvanized iron for the roof, and found girders on a tip. It wasn't bad, they said to one another; in other places they'd known worse.

In the dark of the evening they talked about the crippled man, concerned—and worried as their conversation advanced—since the understanding about payment for the painting had been made with him and it could easily be that when the work was finished the woman would say she knew nothing about what had been agreed, that the sum they claimed as due to them was excessive. They wondered if the crippled man had been taken from the house, if he was in a home. They wondered why the woman still wasn't as she'd been at first.

She backed the Dodge into the middle of the yard, opened the right-hand back door, and left the engine running while she carried out the egg trays from the house and settled them one on top of another on the floor, all this as it always was on a Thursday. Hurrying because she wanted to leave before the men came, she locked the house and banged the car door she'd left open. But the engine, idling nicely, stopped before she got into the driver's seat. And then the blue van was there.

They came toward her at once, the one with glasses making gestures she didn't understand at first and then saw what he was on about. A rear tire had lost some air; he appeared to be saying he would pump it up for her. She knew, she said; it would be all right. She dreaded what would happen now: the Dodge would let her down. But when she turned off the ignition and turned it on again, and tried the starter with the choke out, the engine fired at once.

"Good morning." The older man had to bend at the car window, being so tall. "Good morning," he said again when she wound the window down although she hadn't wanted to. She could hear the ladders going up. "Excuse me," the man who was delaying her said, and she let the car creep on, even though he was leaning on it.

"He's in another room," she said. "A room that's better for him."

She didn't say she had eggs to deliver because they wouldn't understand. She didn't say when you got this old car going you didn't take chances with it because they wouldn't understand that, either.

"He's quiet there," she said.

She drove slowly out of the yard and stalled the engine again.

The painters waited until they could no longer hear the car. Then they moved the ladders, from one upstairs window to the next, until they'd gone all the way round the house. They didn't speak, only glancing at one an-

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other now and again, conversing in that way. When they had finished they lit cigarettes. Almost three-quarters of the work was done: they talked about that, and calculated how much paint was left unused and how much they would receive back on it. They did no work yet.

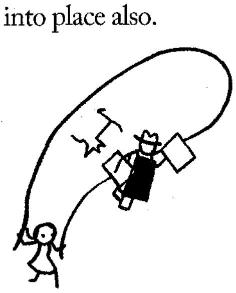
The younger brother left the yard, passing through a gateway in which a gate was propped open by its own weight where a hinge had given way. The older man remained, looking about, opening shed doors and closing them again, listening in case the Dodge returned. He leaned against one of the ladders, finishing his cigarette.

Cloudy to begin with, the sky had cleared. Bright sunlight caught the younger brother's spectacles as he came round the side of the house, causing him to take them off and wipe them clean as he passed back through the gateway. His reconnoitre had led him, through a vegetable patch given up to weeds, into what had been a garden, its single remaining flower bed marked with seed packets that told what its several rows contained. Returning to the yard, he had kept as close to the walls of the house as he could, pressing himself against the stucco surface each time he came to a window, more cautious than he guessed he had to be. The downstairs rooms revealed no more than those above them had and when he listened he heard nothing. No dogs were kept. Cats watched him without interest.

In the yard he shook his head, dismissing his fruitless efforts. There was a paddock with sun on it, he said, and they sat there munching their stale sandwiches and drinking a tin of Pepsi-Cola each.

"The crippled man is dead." The older brother spoke softly and in English, nodding an affirmation of each word, as if to make his meaning clear in case it was not.

"The woman is frightened." He nodded that into place also.



These conjectures were neither contradicted nor commented upon. In silence the two remained in the sun and then they walked through the fields that neglect had impoverished, and in the garden. They looked down at the solitary flower bed, at the bright-colored seed packets marking the empty rows, each packet pierced with a stick. They did not say this was a grave, or remark on how the rank grass, in a wide straight path from the gate, had been crushed and had recovered. They did not draw a finger through the earth in search of seeds where seeds should be, where flowers were promised.

"She wears no ring." The older brother shrugged away that detail, depriving it of any interest it might have had, irrelevant now.

Again they listened for the chug of the car's unreliable engine but it did not come. Since the painting had made it necessary for the windows to be eased in their sashes, the house could now be entered. But when the woman returned she would see it had been in safe hands while she'd been away, its rooms as she had left them, the money untouched. The painting began again and, undisturbed, the men worked until the light went. "She will be here tomorrow," the older brother said. "She will have found the courage, and know we are no threat."

In the van on the way back to their dwelling they talked again about the woman who was not as she had been, and the man who was not there. They guessed and wondered, supposed, surmised. They cooked their food and ate it in uncomfortable confinement, the shreds and crumbs of unreality giving the evening shape. At last impatient, anger had not allowed a woman who had waited too long to wait, again, until she was alone: they sensed enough of truth in that. They smoked slow cigarettes, instinct directing thought. The woman's history was not theirs to know, even though they now were part of it themselves. Their circumstances made them that, as hers made her what she'd become. She would see to it that still the pension came. No one would miss the crippled man, no one went to a lonely place. Tomorrow she would pay for the painting of the house. Tomorrow they would travel on. ♦

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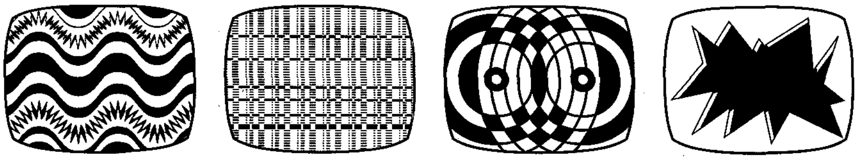

A CRITIC AT LARGE

THE LEGEND OF LENNY

New York celebrates Bernstein the composer.

BY ALEX ROSS

In 1984, when I was fifteen and living in Washington, D.C., I stopped by the National Cathedral to watch Leonard Bernstein conduct a rehearsal of Gustav Mahler's Second Symphony, the "Resurrection." Bernstein was preparing for a concert sponsored by an organization called Musicians Against Nuclear Arms, or MANA. I had little faith that he would prevent Armageddon by conducting Mahler, but I idolized him nonetheless. A score of the symphony was resting on a pew, and I gawked at the "LB" scrawled across the title page. For several minutes, Bernstein busied himself with the two rumbling percussion crescendos that suggest the rending of the earth at the Last Judgment. "Louder! Louder!" he kept shouting, his bellow a model for the players. Later, I followed him at an awed distance while he explored the crypts beneath the cathedral and ascended the narrow, winding stairs into the central tower. When he discovered the carillon, he merrily banged out the closing theme of Stravinsky's "Firebird." Like so many people in the late twentieth century, I was a small object swayed toward a life in music by the gravitational pull of the meandering planet Bernstein.

More than the man, I remember the sound, and the feeling of power that the sound produced. For a long time, I wasn't sure whether Bernstein had really accomplished something epochal or whether he had simply opened an epoch in my mind. The other day, while searching the Internet for information about that performance, I happened upon a broadcast recording of it, which someone in Japan had digitized. The sound quality was a little sketchy, and the playing rough at times (the orchestra was an ad-hoc group assembled from the National Symphony and the Boston Symphony), but the intensity remained. At the climax of the first movement, the brass unleash militant chords that turn fearsomely dissonant, while a scale grinds downward in the remainder of the orchestra. The sequence ends with a violently plunging octave figure. I remember Bernstein flinging down his arms to produce it. On the recording, you can hear the echo sail down the nave of the cathedral, like a hammer thrown with enormous force.

The moment exemplifies Bernstein's ability to render almost any abstract sequence of notes or chords as a physical act, a sweatily human gesture. The effect is difficult to achieve. Musicians must be cajoled into creating a particular kind of unison: not a robotic sameness of execution but a deeper unanimity in which spontaneous activities on the part of each player viscerally realize the conductor's vision. There are videos in which you can see Bernstein striving for that unanimity, and it is not always pleasant to watch. When the feeling is absent, he exhibits irritation, rage, or—most unsettlingly—an unhappiness that threatens to spiral into despair. He tells members of the august Vienna Philharmonic that unless they try harder "there will be no Mahler," and then he hangs his head, as if averting his eyes from an unspeakable crime. Usually, things turn around. The players fall in line—that trembling, hurtling line in which Bernstein seemed the most inspired follower rather than the leader. Although he basked in fame, he never accumulated power: each night, he gave away everything he had.

This fall, Carnegie Hall, in league with the New York Philharmonic and other organizations, has been presenting a festival called "Bernstein: The Best of All Possible Worlds." Bernstein, who died in 1990, would have turned ninety this year, but no excuse for a party is needed. When the festival ends this week, with a chamber concert, Carnegie's leaders should take a bow; their series has delighted a fretful city. Films of Bernstein's performances have been shown, his incomparable television lectures have been revived, old friends keep seizing a microphone to tell Lenny stories. But the festival has been more than a welter of nostalgia. Bernstein, long seen as a wondrously talented but creatively unfulfilled figure, is finally getting his due as a composer. His body of work is, of course, uneven. In October, Carnegie revived "Mass," a pop-laced deconstruction of Christian ritual in which Bernstein's greatest strengths and flaws collide in a single unstable compound. Some listeners left elated, others bewildered. Yet, in its riotous strangeness, Bernstein's "Mass" demonstrated just how original this composer was.

The story of Bernstein plays like a modern American fable. A prodigious boy from Lawrence, Massachusetts, the son of Ukrainian shtetl immigrants, one day sits down at his aunt's upright and begins plinking out notes. Within months, he is outplaying his first piano teacher; within a couple of years, he has mastered "Rhapsody in Blue." While enrolled at Harvard, he impresses the conductors Dimitri Mitropoulos and Serge Koussevitzky, wins a lifelong friend in Aaron Copland, and, on the side, writes a senior thesis on African-American themes in classical music which is still worth reading. He moves to New York in September, 1942, at the age of twenty-four, and in a little more than two years pulls off an extraordinary triple feat: he wins national notice as a conductor when he substitutes for Bruno Walter at the New York Philharmonic; he establishes himself as a concert-hall composer with the rock-solid, formidably eloquent First

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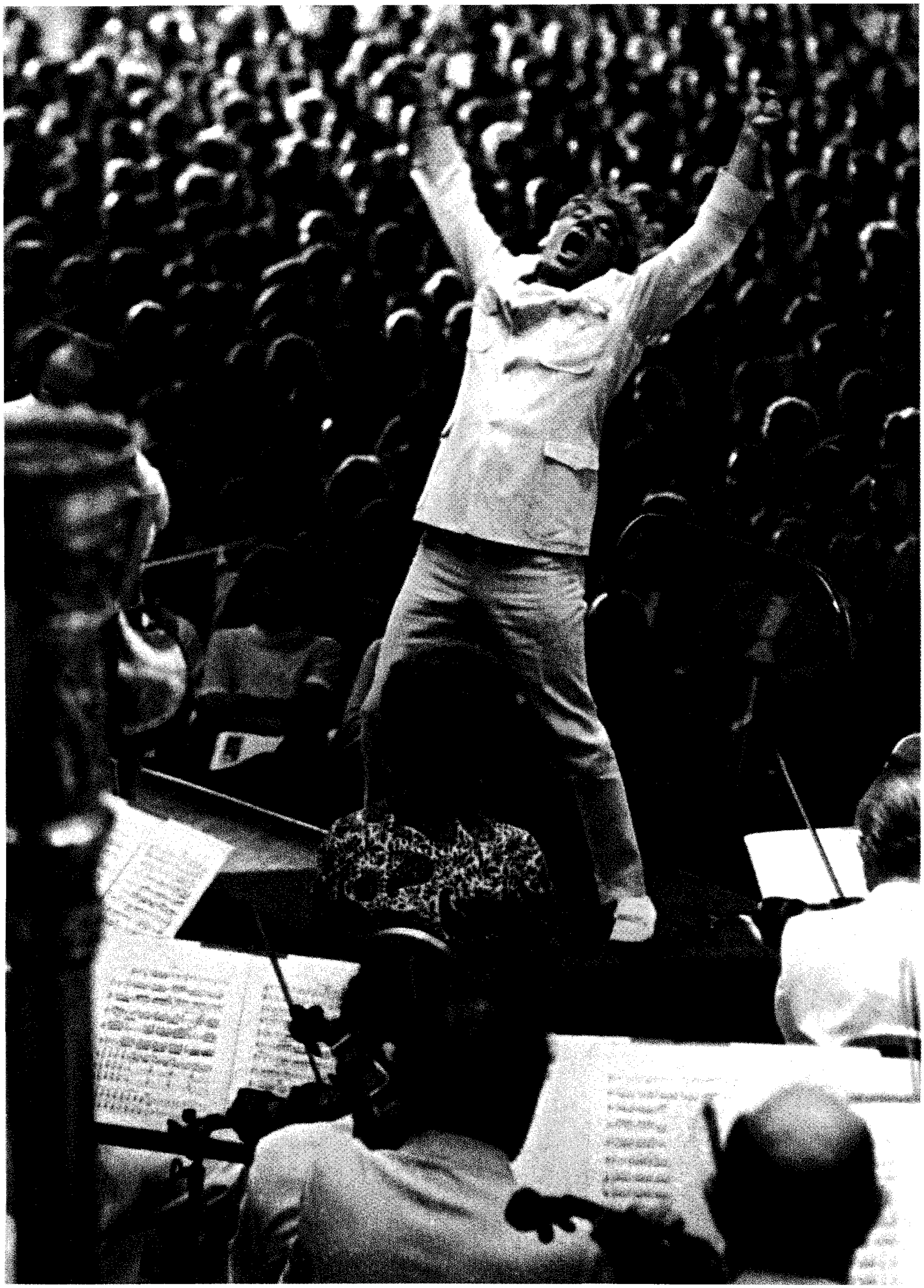

Bernstein conducting the Boston Symphony in a performance of Mahler's "Resurrection" Symphony at Tanglewood, in 1970.

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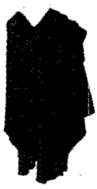


Symphony, "Jeremiah"; and, with Betty Comden and Adolph Green, he knocks out a hit musical, "On the Town." By V-E Day, in 1945, Bernstein was one of the most famous American artists of his generation. A recent revival of "On the Town" at City Center, with some of the original Jerome Robbins dances vibrantly re-created, evoked the gleeful energy with which Bernstein descended on the city that became his home.

Behind the remarkable early successes lurked a series of identity crises that were never entirely resolved. To attend the Bernstein festival night after night was to watch this man's sometimes desperate struggle to find the proper vessel for his talent. In a better world, these conflicts—between classical and popular traditions, between composing and conducting, between high-art institutions and radical politics, between gay and straight sexualities—would have mattered little. The spirit of the man, which had something primordial, almost animalistic, about it, overwhelmed all categories.

In childhood, Bernstein was an omnivorous consumer of music, blissfully unaware of the distinctions between high and low, élite and pop. He happily took in Gilbert and Sullivan, Yiddish folk songs, Beethoven symphonies, Chopin nocturnes, jazz, bel-canto opera, dissonant modernism, and more or less everything else. Children tend to listen this way—they solemnly chant commercial jingles and dance giddily to Bach. Bernstein's genius was never to let go of his boyish avidity, and to combine it with an analytic awareness of how disparate styles fit together. He had an X-ray-like ability to perceive melodic kinships beneath sonic surfaces, and in his ambitious Norton Lectures, of 1973, he attempted to construct a global syntax of music, along the lines of Noam Chomsky's structural linguistics. The theory can be picked apart, but Bernstein's compositional practice goes some way toward proving it.

One evening in October, Jack Gottlieb, who served as Bernstein's assistant at the New York Philharmonic, presented a lecture-concert at the Jewish Museum in which he and various performers demonstrated Bernstein's relationship with Jewish traditions. In the process, they highlighted the composer's knack for alchemically transforming his own material. One part of the program focussed on "Chichester Psalms," Bernstein's choral masterpiece from 1965. Gottlieb noted that the music of the second movement—combining Psalm 23 ("The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want") with Psalm 2 ("Why do the nations rage")—is largely derived from other projects. Just before writing the "Psalms," Bernstein tried to write a musical based on Thornton Wilder's "The Skin of Our Teeth." When the project fell through, he saw that one completed number, the gently bluesy duet "Spring Will Come Again," fit the words of the psalm: "Winds may blow" became "Adonai," "Spring will come again" became "Naf'shi y'shovev." Bernstein also retooled a castoff number from "West Side Story," a fight song called "Mix," to produce Psalm 2: "Make a mess of 'em/Make the sons of bitches pay" mutated into "Lamah rag'shu/Lamah ra-g'-shu goyim." Bernstein's propulsively muttering musical line applies equally to rival gangs and raging nations, which are, after all, symptoms of the same disease. The Amor Artis Choir and the soprano Heather Buck sang the pieces at the Jewish Museum, and it was like watching one of the great magic tricks in history explained.

Bernstein's skill at playing such games raises the suspicion that he was merely a facile trickster. But his manipulations and appropriations served carefully calculated expressive ends. As Kent Tritle demonstrated when he conducted "Psalms" at St. Ignatius Loyola Church, in October, all those vernacular melodies and street rhythms are folded into an atmosphere of sacred purity, a kind of athletic innocence. Throughout the early years, Bernstein's craftsmanship was unerring. This fall, the New York Philharmonic presented the "Jeremiah" Symphony, the "Age of Anxiety" Symphony, and the "Serenade" for violin, strings, and percussion. I heard the last two, in performances under Lorin Maazel, the Philharmonic's current director, and Alan Gilbert, his designated successor. If neither man quite caught the authentic Bernstein swing, the works were revealed above all as enduringly solid constructions. These days, with composers using computer software to generate reams of notes and washes of timbre, the early Bernstein can be held up as a model of economy, his big structures extrapolated from a core set of intervals. "West Side Story," a fantasia on tritones and fifths ("Mari-a!"), remains, of course, his most staggering achievement. With a major revival opening next week in Washington, D.C., and arriving on Broadway in February, the Bernstein renaissance may go on for some time after the Carnegie festival ends.

Just as "West Side Story" had its première, Bernstein's second crisis—the tension between composing and conducting—came to a head. Two weeks before the show opened, in August, 1957, Bernstein signed a contract to become the sole music director of the New York Philharmonic, more or less guaranteeing that his creative output would fall off drastically. He had long been encouraged to make the move. As early as 1939, Copland and his fellow-composers Roy Harris and William Schuman had hatched a plan for the young man to become "America's Great Conductor," as Humphrey Burton reports in his 1994 biography of Bernstein. The older composers saw that he could lead American classical music into the mainstream. They were not much concerned that he might have to sacrifice his own composing in the process. Bernstein fell in love with conducting, and happily pursued it. Composing, by contrast, inspired a certain terror in him, and the theatre world caused him endless frustration. In July, 1957, he wrote to his wife, the Chilean-American actress Felicia Montealegre, "*This is the last show I do.*" Noting that the Philharmonic contract was ready to be signed, he added, "I'm going to be a conductor, after all."

At the Philharmonic, Bernstein raised Mahler on high, celebrated American composers, and dabbled in the avant-garde. He transformed the dowdy business of music education with his nationally televised Young People's Concerts. He wrote two best-selling books, "The Joy of Music" and "The Infinite Variety of Music," both still recommended as guides to the classical repertory. He and his wife became fixtures of society. His national celebrity increased to the point that he became a political figure, consorting with the Kennedys and later campaigning against the Vietnam War. Consequently, between 1957 and 1971, Bernstein produced only two substantial works, the "Kaddish" Symphony and "Chichester Psalms." The "Psalms" approaches perfection, but "Kaddish," which subjects the audience to an overblown quarrel with God ("O, my Father: ancient, hallowed, lonely, disappointed Father"), suggests a distracted composer. I wonder whether three or four more operas and shows on the order of "Candide" and "West Side Story" might have done more to advance the cause of American classical music than all of Bernstein's concerts and broadcasts put together.

In the late sixties, Bernstein tried to correct the balance again. "I'm really a composer and I don't have any time to do my other work," he told the Philharmonic management in 1966. He led his final concert as the orchestra's music director in 1969 and attended a Jimi Hendrix show the following night, relishing his escape from routine and plotting a compositional second act. The Beatles and other progressive rock acts fascinated him. "Mass," his most ambitious creation, was on the horizon; Jackie Kennedy had requested a work for the opening of the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, in Washington. But within two years Bernstein was in the thick of more crises, political and sexual, and neither he nor his family ever fully recovered.

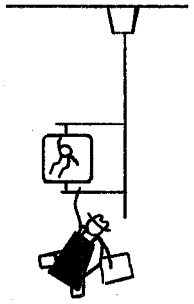
One night in 1970, Felicia Bernstein hosted a fund-raiser on behalf of twenty-one associates of the Black Panther Party who had been indicted for conspiring to bomb buildings and kill police. Her husband arrived late from a rehearsal of Beethoven's "Fidelio," and, perhaps charged up by that tale of oppression and liberation, he inserted himself into the discussion, voicing sympathy for the Black Panthers' egalitarian aims but quizzing Donald Cox, the Panther field marshal, about the group's propensity for violence. Two journalists were present: Charlotte Curtis, of the *Times*, and Tom Wolfe, of *New York*. "If business won't give us full employment, we must take the means of production and put them in the hands of the people," Cox said at one point. According to Curtis, Bernstein replied, "I dig absolutely." In Wolfe's account, Bernstein said, "How? I dig it! But how?" Bernstein later tried to explain that Cox had ended his statement with a "You dig?" and that he was simply answering in kind. Whatever the particulars, the reports conjured up an unsympathetic picture: America's Great Conductor trying to talk jive with extremists. After Curtis's article ran, the *Times'* editorial page accused Bernstein of "elegant slumming" and stated that he had "mocked the memory of Martin Luther King, Jr." Protesters appeared outside the Bernstein apartment building. Waves of hostile mail landed on the couple and also on their guests.

Wolfe's piece, which ran under the famous title "Radical Chic: That Party at Lenny's," was a tour de force of dispassion-

FARLEY KATZ

"No, no, that won't be necessary—they're doing a pretty good job on themselves."

ate hostility, characterizing Bernstein as a "more than competent composer" and then mocking him as "the Great Interrupter, the Village Explainer, the champion of Mental Jotto, the Free Analyst, Mr. Let's Find Out." Wolfe reduced Bernstein's passion for African-American music to a caricature of racial tourism, pushing the idea that his subject was obsessively fixated on the figure of a "Negro by the piano" (perhaps a case of projection on the part of the author). Felicia Bernstein was derided for the "million-dollar-chatchka look" of the apartment. She avoided reading the article, but she could hardly avoid hearing about it, and the episode had a devastating effect on her. At a panel discussion with members of the family at Carnegie Hall, Jamie Bernstein, one of the couple's three children, recalled, "There was this sense that our mother never recovered from the heartbreak and shame of this incident. No one was all the way to happy again."



When the F.B.I.'s files were opened, years later, radical chic turned out to be more than a case of a musician making an ass of himself. Many of those angry letters had been generated by operatives in J. Edgar Hoover's counter-intelligence program; one memo notes that the correspondence was scripted to highlight the Black Panthers' "anti-Semetic posture and pro-Arab position"; the misspelling points up the hypocrisy of the enterprise. Richard Nixon, too, followed the case, marking Bernstein as the personification of "the complete decadence of the American 'upper class' intellectual elite." (This was written in the margins of Daniel Moynihan's memo encouraging a "benign neglect" of African-American issues.) If, as William F. Buckley, Jr., said, Bernstein was parroting the lingo of fanatics, Wolfe was, in his own way, a mouthpiece, his fashionably tart prose advancing the new art of wedge-issue politics. In retrospect, the entire episode reeks of hysteria, and Bernstein was by no means the most hysterical person in the room.

"My father was absolutely fearless," Alexander Bernstein said at the Carnegie panel. "He was afraid of nobody and no thing." After a well-timed pause, he added, "Except for Jerome Robbins." Certainly, Bernstein did not fear Hoover, Nixon, or Tom Wolfe. "Mass," which had its début in September, 1971, was a work of unrepentant radicalism, an all-out assault on social, political, religious, and musical convention. Because it was the first piece to be played in the Kennedy Center, the President was expected to attend, but, in one of the more curious memos in the F.B.I.'s files, Hoover warned Nixon that Bernstein might be plotting to "embarrass the United States government" by inducing the President and other officials to applaud a Latin text on "an antiwar theme." (He seems to have been referring to "Dona nobis pacem.") Various members of the White House Plumbers, including G. Gordon Liddy, looked into the matter, and it was decided that Nixon should not go. Interestingly, Henry Kissinger did attend, and, according to the society report in the *Times*, he "liked it."

What's not to like? As it turns out, a lot. In previous works, Bernstein had played by the rules of whatever genre he inhabited, no matter how much he stretched them. "West Side Story" is a musical with modernist touches; "The Age of Anxiety" and "Chichester Psalms" are classical works interlaced with jazz and blues. "Mass," created in collaboration with the composer and lyricist Stephen Schwartz, is unnameable. It begins with a chaotic soundscape of voices and percussion on quadraphonic tape. Then open fifths sound on an electric guitar, and a Celebrant, dressed in street clothes, chants, "Sing God a simple song," in a clean, striking lyric line. A multifront war among styles begins: Broadway tunes, gospel in the manner of Schwartz's "Godspell," attempts at folk-rock, anthemic choruses with marching band, austere reminiscences of medieval and Renaissance church music. The work is described as a "Theater Piece for Singers, Players, and Dancers"; the essential plot is that the Celebrant tries to bring his church up to date, takes on the trappings of a cult leader, and eventually loses control of his congregation.

The lyrics present the greatest challenge. They are laden with arch wordplay ("Let there be sprats to gobble the gnats"), dorm-room theology ("I believe in God,/But does God believe in me?"), and slangy rewrites of the Bible ("God said: Let there be light./And there was light./. . . And it was good, brother/And it was goddam good"). But before we sneer à la Wolfe—Bernstein says to God, "I dig it! But how?"—we should ask what the composer is really up to. He may be holding a satirical mirror up to Nixon's America, teasing establishment and counterculture alike. He may even be portraying his own quixotic attempt to master pop culture. The Celebrant—first idolized by his parishioners, then criticized—resembles Bernstein himself, the supposed savior of classical music. And, if "Mass" sometimes falls mortifyingly short in its attempt at a pop-classical fusion, mortification is the subject of the finale, when the Celebrant smashes his chalice and remarks on "how easily things get broken." The orchestra thumps out shuddering, dissonant chords that are like a sharp knock at the door. (A similar figure appears in the lamentations of the "Jeremiah" Symphony.) The Celebrant's shattered phrases also recall the mad scene in "Peter Grimes." It's as if Bernstein had hosted an out-of-control party and then unleashed the demons of his depression in the wee hours. The dark night of the soul gives way to a reprise of "Simple Song," a glowingly tonal canon on "Lauda, Laude," and a powerfully gentle blessing of the house. The sequence may be Bernstein's greatest theatrical invention.

Still, it's hard to pull it all together. The recent revival came courtesy of the Baltimore Symphony, with Jubilant Sykes forcefully embodying the Celebrant, the Morgan State University Choir and the Brooklyn Youth Chorus full-throatedly delivering the choruses, and Marin Alsop conducting with absolute conviction. There were two New York performances on consecutive days: one at Carnegie and one at the United Palace Theatre, in Washington Heights. The first was troubled by sound problems—there was widespread amplification, which, as usual, worked poorly at Carnegie—and also by a basic sense that this unabashedly over-the-top piece didn't belong in the grand old hall. The United Palace performance, though, benefitted from gaudier surroundings—the theatre is owned by the television evangelist Reverend Ike—and from the exuberant participation of four hundred singers from New York City schools. Seated in the front rows of the audience, the kids periodically stood up, sang, and danced in place, and, at the end, they turned around to sing the closing benediction: "Fill with grace/All who dwell in this place." Some of the children lined the aisles, offering their hands to the audience, in accordance with Bernstein's stage directions. At Carnegie this moment made me cringe; in Washington Heights resistance was futile.

In his final years, Bernstein entered a kind of second adolescence, with the inevitable problems that adolescent behavior entails for a man past the age of fifty. He stayed up all night, drank, took pills, and slept with various young men. On certain nights, he swerved into ugly, caustic moods, offending family and longtime friends. (The singer Michael Feinstein disclosed, during a jovial evening of Bernstein standards at Zankel Hall, that he had refused to attend a seventieth-birthday tribute, in 1988, because he found Bernstein's antics unbearable.) In 1976, Bernstein separated from his wife, and nearly came out as a gay man when he told a Philharmonic audience that Shostakovich's death-obsessed Fourteenth Symphony made him realize that he had to "live the rest of my life as I want." Then, in 1978, Felicia Bernstein died, of cancer, leaving her husband scored by guilt. To most onlookers, though, he remained his majestically ebullient self; that was the Lenny I glimpsed in 1984.

Huge ovations greeted his conducting—Vienna all but worshipped him—but compositional triumphs eluded him. The major works of his last two decades—the ballet "Dybbuk," the musical "1600 Pennsylvania Avenue," the vocal symphony "Songfest," the semi-autobiographical opera "A Quiet Place," and the orchestral suite "Jubilee Games"—show a falling off of inspiration and a more uncertain command of structure. They have many splendid moments, however, and come alive in the hands of committed advocates. Gustavo Dudamel, the young Venezuelan who stirs memories of Bernstein at his most dynamic, conducted "Jubilee Games" with the Israel Philharmonic, savoring its punchy rhythms. Michael Tilson Thomas, who more than anyone has carried on Bernstein's music-appreciation efforts, included haunting excerpts from "A Quiet Place" at an all-Bernstein gala with the San Francisco Symphony.

The Tilson Thomas concert also had a selection from "Songfest"—Bernstein's setting of "To What You Said," a Walt Whitman poem that came to light in the nineteen-fifties. Thomas Hampson rendered the song with immense nobility, as if embodying a composer who had finally found a measure of sexual and spiritual repose:

> To what you said, passionately clasping my hand, this is my answer:
> Though you have strayed hither, for my sake, you can never belong to me, nor I to you,
> Behold the customary loves and friendships—the cold guards,
> I am that rough and simple person
> I am he who kisses his comrade lightly on the lips at parting, and I am one who is kissed in return,
> I introduce that new American salute
> Behold love choked, correct, polite, always suspicious
> Behold the received models of the parlors—What are they to me?
> What to these young men that travel with me?

The music has a richly melancholy air, akin to Tchaikovsky's "Pathétique," but at the words "that new American salute" the snare drum taps out a martial rhythm, hinting at love's armies on the march. It seems prepared to end in radiant C major, but when the last big chord fades away you become aware of a C-minor chord lingering in the strings, indicating, perhaps, some abiding loneliness.

In the end, despite his Boston Brahmin accent and other trappings of cosmopolitan glamour, Bernstein almost fit the Whitmanesque tag of being a "rough and simple person." Works like "Kaddish" and "Mass" alienate many modern listeners because they are so brazen in their approach; they greet the listener as the man himself greeted visitors backstage, with wet hugs and kisses full on the lips. A man genetically incapable of saying anything but what he really meant, he presents a rude challenge to the attitude of professional caution that now prevails in so many precincts of the arts—the aesthetic of avoiding entanglements, of looking over one's shoulder, of perpetually hedging one's bets. In a culture of cynical chic, Bernstein teaches the power of impassioned affirmation. His 1973 Norton lectures—titled "The Unanswered Question," after Charles Ives—end with a concise credo: "I'm no longer quite sure what the question is, but I do know that the answer is *Yes*." ♦

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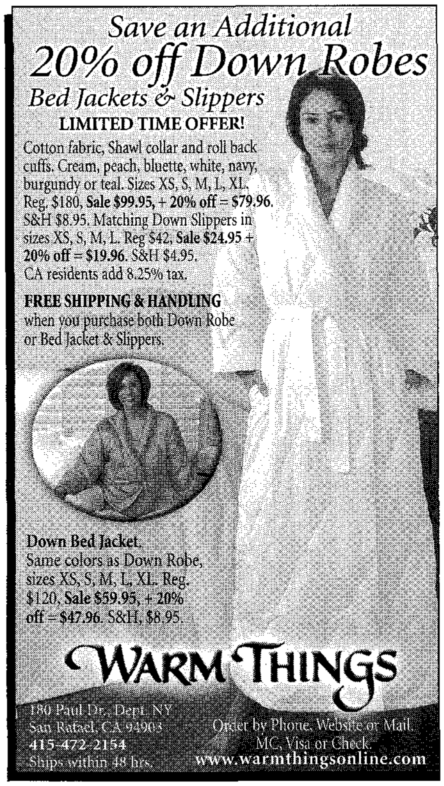
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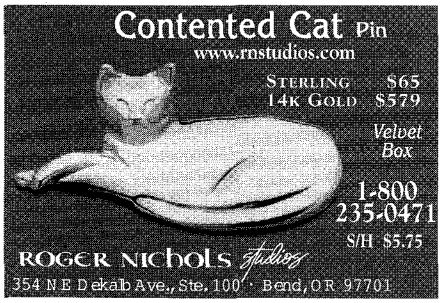
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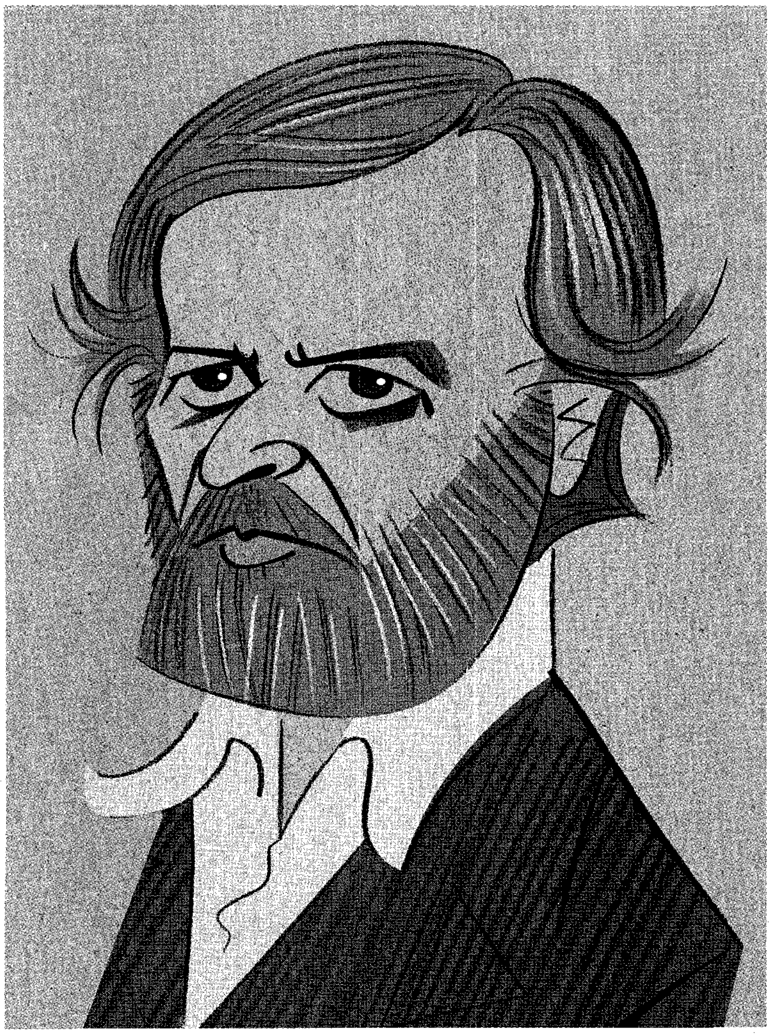
BOOKS

LIKE MEN BETRAYED

Revisiting Richard Yates's "Revolutionary Road."

BY JAMES WOOD



Yates wrote male characters who are anxious, easily provoked by female resistance.

ROBERT RISKO

In April, 1951, Richard Yates sailed from New York to Paris. He had been there twice before, as a child and, later, as a soldier, but for him, as for so many American writers, it was less a place than a laurelled idea—the silvery and careless city of Hemingway and Fitzgerald. Careless, but a literary workshop, too: Yates said that he was determined to produce short stories there "at the rate of about one a month." Then twenty-five years old, he was beginning an indenture that would last until his death, in 1992. Around the compulsion of writing he shaped everything else. There were two other compulsions, smoking and drinking, but they only killed him, while writing plainly kept him alive. (He was an alcoholic, but he rarely wrote while drunk.) He lived in New York, in Iowa, in Los Angeles, in Boston, and, finally, in Alabama, yet his homes were identical in their shabby discipline of neglect. In each there was a table for writing, a circle of crushed cockroaches around the desk chair, curtains made colorless by cigarette smoke, a few books, and nothing much in the kitchen but coffee, bourbon, and beer. Friends and colleagues found these accommodations appallingly bleak; for Yates they were accommodations for writing.

Paris was never the glamorous hubbub for Yates that it had been for an earlier literary generation, but it was there, and in Cannes, and then in London, that the young writer began his career. There is a wonderful moment in Blake Bailey's 2003 biography of Yates when, after fourteen unpublished short stories, the fifteenth ("Number 15 off the production line" is how Yates described it) is sent to *The Atlantic*, narrowly rejected, and then finally accepted—for two hundred and fifty extremely useful dollars. A cable brought the marvellous news, in unstopped sky-high capitals. Over the next few years, Yates made only a modest living from his stories, but they brokered his reputation, and secured the interest and encouragement of a publisher who, like all publishers, wanted a novel, not a book of stories. That first novel was "Revolutionary Road" (1961)—the basis of a new movie with Leonardo DiCaprio and Kate Winslet—and it could be said to have dissolved its creator's career even as it founded it, because Yates never published a novel half as good again. To put it brutally, he had about ten good years. His later fiction was compulsive but not compelling, necessary to him but not to his readers, who would always chase the fire of his first novel in the embers of its successors.

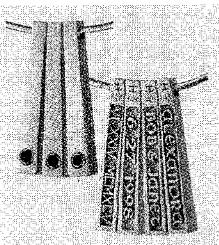
Yates's early stories, now gathered in an edition with "Revolutionary Road" and his 1976 novel "The Easter Parade" (Everyman's Library; $26), are highly disciplined, formally chaste. Because "Revolutionary Road" became the decade's great, terrifying indictment of suburban surrender, Yates's stories are often likened to John Cheever's, but they are closer to J. F. Powers's: the same richly restrained prose, luxuriously lined but plain to the touch; the same anxious comedy; the same very cold, appraising eye; and the same superb ear for the foolish histrionics of speech. Out of the apparently diplomatic conformity of mid-twentieth-century American realism—the sort of style that made short stories commercially salable—bursts the monstrous ego of Yates's male characters, smashing all the eggshell niceties. These men are vulnerable, easily provoked by female competition or resistance, and their theatrical, role-playing speech haplessly shrouds and reveals their anxieties, in clouds of unknowing. John Fallon, in "The B.A.R. Man," lives in Sunnyside, Queens, and has been married for ten years to a woman who can't have children and who, tellingly, "earned more money than he did." When he has lunch with three colleagues, conversation turns to military service, and Fallon is obscurely irritated by the complaining of his friends. None of them, he points out, had to carry a heavy Browning automatic rifle, or B.A.R., as he did. "Every son of a bitch *in* a rifle company's a specialist, if you wanna know something," he says. "And I'll tellya *one* thing, Mac—they don't worry about no silk gloves and no tailor-made clothes, you can betcher ass on that." His anger feeds on his inadequacy, because, Yates reveals, he had in fact fired his gun only twice, "at vague areas rather than men, had brought down nothing either time, and had been mildly reprimanded the second time for wasting ammunition." At home, Fallon is cruel to his wife. They are due to go out to a movie, but he picks up the bra she has laid out on the bed—"a white brassiere containing the foam-rubber cups without which her chest was as meager as a boy's"—and waves it in her face, saying, "Why d'ya *wear* these goddamn things?" Fallon tears out of the house, goes drinking, dances at a club, and tries to pick up a woman who isn't interested. He, however, can imagine her body, "undulant and naked, in some ultimate vague bedroom at the end of the night"—one of those moments when a seemingly transparent Yates sentence suddenly takes on riches.

Yates's noticing of the padded foam-rubber bra is typical. These stories share with "Revolutionary Road" an astonishing comprehension that is sometimes a little close to cruelty. What impresses is the refusal to let sentiment seep in (though in the later work this toughness, as in Hemingway, can become its own species of sentimentality). "The Best of Everything" is a masterpiece of bleakness, equal to one of Joyce's stories in "Dubliners." It is two days before Grace's wedding, and her roommate has discreetly absented herself for the night, so that Grace's fiancé, Ralph, can visit. She prepares for him—she takes from her trousseau a sheer nightgown of white nylon and a matching negligee. But Ralph turns up late in the evening, and is wholly involved with his own trivial drama: the boys have given him a surprise party, and he is expected back. Does he like what she is wearing, she shyly asks. He feels the slight material between finger and thumb, "like a merchant," and asks, "Wudga pay fa this, honey?" Grace tries to get Ralph to stay, but understands that her appeal—"Can't they wait?"—sounds just like "the whine of a wife." Ralph insists on going, and says, on the way out, "So I'll see ya, Penn Station, nine o'clock tomorra. Right, Gracie? Only, before I go . . . I'm fulla beer. Mind if I use ya terlet?" As he leaves the house, Grace says wearily, "Don't worry, Ralph . . . I'll be there." And the story ends there, where it has to, at a perfect zero of hope.

On his return from Europe, in September, 1953, Yates went back to work, as a freelance copywriter, for the company that had hired him four years earlier, the business-machine giant Remington Rand. He found it dull, but said, years later, that "it occupied only about half of my working time and so financed the whole of my first novel." For a year, he and his wife and daughter lived in a ranch-style house in Redding, Connecticut. It was this close suburban life, with its dreary drunken rituals and stolid neighbors, along with the Yateses' frequent marital fighting, that provided the material for "Revolutionary Road," though most of the book was written not there but in the small town of Mahopac, New York, where the Yateses lived in a ramshackle cottage on a genteelly rotting private estate.

In the novel, Yates and his wife become Frank and April Wheeler, who live in a suburban Connecticut house, at the end of what is called Revolutionary Road (past a new development called Revolutionary Hill Estates). It is 1955. Frank is anything but frank, and springlike April will die in the fall. Life on Revolutionary Road is theatrical. The novel begins with a performance, ends with a performance, and courses throughout with performances of one kind or another. As it opens, the local amateur dramatic group is presenting a play, "The Petrified Forest," whose lead player is April Wheeler. The evening is a disaster—the actors lose their nerve and mangle the script—and, afterward, April and Frank argue violently. She is mortified by the disaster and wants to be left alone; he, wheedling and paternalistic, wants the husbandly right to soothe her, and thus assert a moist control.

Frank works in New York for Knox



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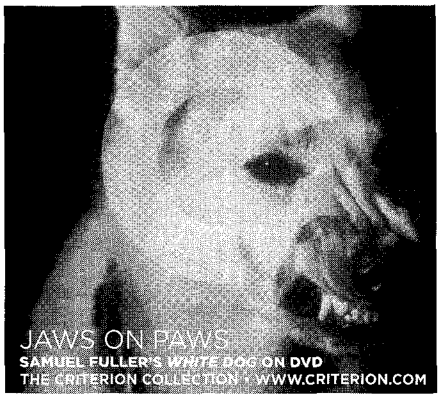
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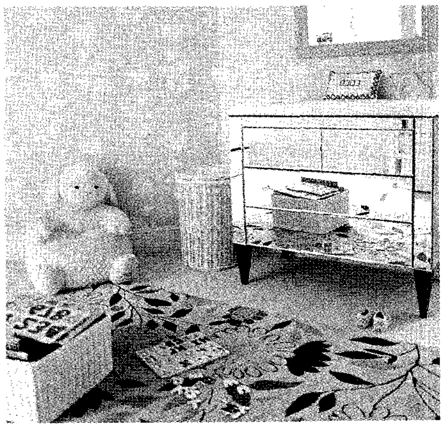

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Business Machines but prides himself that he takes his job ironically, that he cares nothing for it, and that his real life is elsewhere. Yates was playing a morbid joke on himself when he created Frank Wheeler, because Frank is Yates without the writing: he is saving himself for an invisible "creative" life that he is too unimaginative to envision. When April suggests that the family go to Paris and that he give up his job, Frank's bluff is called. Europe had been the great dream of escape. But seven years earlier, when the couple were first together, April had got pregnant, and that escape had been deferred. This time, they will really do it! As April coaxingly reminds him, "You'll be doing what you should've been allowed to do seven years ago. You'll be finding yourself. You'll be reading and studying and taking long walks and thinking. You'll have *time*." But perhaps there is no Frank to find. The plan for Paris frightens him, though he keeps his fear quiet. For a while, he goes along with April's bovarysme, halfheartedly tries to learn French, and even announces his determination to leave his job in the fall. But, when April later tells him that, once again, she is unexpectedly pregnant, he gladly seizes the solution. Paris can't now go ahead, or will have to be delayed by several years. Yates comments, "The pressure was off; life had come mercifully back to normal." Frank is forever rehearsing scenarios in his mind, and in one of them he imagines April asking him what they will do now:

> "Well, but what about you?" April would say. "How are you *ever* going to find yourself now?" But as he firmly shut off the hot-water faucet he knew he would have the answer for her:
>
> "Suppose we let that be my business."
>
> And there was a new maturity and manliness in the kindly, resolute face that nodded back at him in the mirror.

But April, determined not to have a third child, tries to abort her fetus at home, and dies in the bungling of it. Frank's children go to live with his brother and wife. At work, Frank is promoted.

"Revolutionary Road" is a brilliant rewriting of "Madame Bovary," with one signal difference—at the end of Flaubert's novel, both Emma and Charles Bovary lose, because she commits suicide and her dull husband is utterly bereft. In Yates's savage inversion, the wife loses but the dull husband secretly wins: though deprived of wife and children, he prospers at work, and finally secures for himself the safe, settled world that his wife died trying to dislodge. In "Revolutionary Road," mid-century American suburban man is so maddening because he is both a rank escapist and a conservative pragmatist: he has arrogated to himself twin rights that ought to be incompatible—to dream of escape (and have adulterous affairs, like Emma Bovary), while simultaneously dreaming of timid stability, like Charles Bovary.

Yates's novel is—in just this Flaubertian manner—both traditional and radical. Its traditionalism can be felt in the way it flourishes the artisanal virtues of structure and finish. The prose is beautifully alert and poised: "his thin mouth already moving in the curly shape of wit, as if he were rolling a small, bitter lozenge on his tongue." The book's form is a solid delight of symmetry and repetition. Just as April's first pregnancy scuppered the original European escape (but didn't really, because Frank never intended to go), so her third scuppers the later one (but doesn't really, either, for the same reason). Frank's father also worked at Knox. A play opens the novel, and a performance ends it, as the Wheelers' neighbors, the Campbells, tell the new owners of the Wheelers' house about the tragedy that has vacated the property. In the very last pages, Mrs. Givings, the appallingly eager real-estate agent who had sold the Wheelers their house, describes, to her husband, the new owners in the same language she once used to describe the Wheelers: "She's very sweet and fun to talk to; he's rather reserved. I think he must do something very brilliant in town." Frank's children, now motherless, will have the kind of parentless existence with their uncle that April Wheeler had as a child, and which, her husband felt, damaged her. So the horror begins all over again: these repetitions and circularities overlap to make the novel's heavy plait of determinism.

Above all, the novel is nimbly prismatic. It seems to offer a familiar critique of the suburbs, of the kind we know from movies and books like "American Beauty" and "The Ice Storm," in which the streets are amok with hysterical housewives and

angry soft men. Yates himself said that he intended the novel to function as "an indictment of American life in the nineteen-fifties":

> Because during the Fifties there was a general lust for conformity over this country, by no means only in the suburbs—a kind of blind, desperate clinging to safety and security at any price, as exemplified politically in the Eisenhower administration and the McCarthy witch-hunts. . . . I meant the title to suggest that the revolutionary road of 1776 had come to something very much like a dead end in the Fifties.

But the tale is subtler than the teller, because the novel does not allow us an easy point of agreement. Mrs. Givings's son, John, is a former mathematician who has suffered a breakdown and has been taken to a mental hospital by the state troopers. He is occasionally let out, and twice visits the Wheelers. At one point during his first visit, Frank condemns "the hopeless emptiness of everything in this country," and John Givings eagerly agrees: "Now you've said it. The hopeless emptiness. Hell, plenty of people are on to the emptiness part; out where I used to work, on the Coast, that's all we ever talked about. We'd sit around talking about emptiness all night. Nobody ever said 'hopeless,' though; that's where we'd chicken out. Because maybe it does take a certain amount of guts to see the emptiness, but it takes a whole hell of a lot more to see the hopelessness." This has the ring of an authorial statement, the leathery, hard-won "honesty" for which Yates is praised. (Blake Bailey's absorbing biography is titled "A Tragic Honesty.") And John Givings's status as an outcast, a mental patient who sees through the congealed horror, lends him a seerlike authority. But remember that it was the thoroughly inauthentic Frank Wheeler who supplied the easy Conradian phrase "the hopeless emptiness of everything," and who, pages earlier, denounced the suburbs for locking up people like John Givings:

> Wasn't this, he asked, a beautifully typical story of these times and this place? A man could rant and smash and grapple with the State Police, and still the sprinklers whirled at dusk on every lawn and the television droned in every living room. . . . "Call the Troopers, get him out of sight quick, hustle him off and lock him up before he wakes the neighbors. . . . It's *as if everybody's made this tacit agreement to* live in a state of total self-deception."

SCHOOL BUS
PAUL NOTH

"At this time I'd like to welcome our gold-medallion passengers on board."

• •

Once again, just as we quickly reach for our own preferred weapon of condemnation—yes, we say to ourselves, how very true is this "beautifully typical story of these times and this place," how right this book is about "the hopeless emptiness of everything"!—we find the novel judging our own judgmentalism, qualifying our superiority. And the novel escapes, somehow, to live another, more complicated and mysterious life.

Detractors of classic realism like to claim that it is the most complacent of narrative styles, because it never questions its own artifice. But "Revolutionary Road" is, essentially, a novel all about artifice, and thus about its own artifice. When Frank criticizes the suburbs for being insufficiently daring, his complacent ranting has the feel of a performance, no more successful than April Wheeler's "The Petrified Forest." But then Frank is always playing a role. He is introduced as a man who had "the kind of unemphatic good looks that an advertising photographer might use to portray the discerning consumer of well-made but inexpensive merchandise (Why Pay More?)" As a student at Columbia, he played at being an intellectual—he was "a Jean-Paul Sartre sort of man." He plays at being a father, and at being a husband. Later in the book, when he is trying to persuade April not to attempt the abortion, he decides that he must impress her as he had once done when they were young. He embarks on a long effort to dissuade her, which involves "a form of masculine flirtation that was as skillful as any girl's." He holds his head "unnaturally erect," and takes care to arrange his features in "a virile frown" whenever he lights a cigarette. On Revolutionary Road, life has collapsed into advertising: his attempt at dissuasion is described by Yates as "a sales campaign."

But, of course, a novel in which characters have become brand names—"a Jean-Paul Sartre sort of man"—is a novel that also raises the question: So what *is* a rounded literary character? Frank's theatricality is a form of fiction-making, after all. When Mrs. Campbell, at the end of the novel, tells the new owners about the "tragedy" of the Wheelers, she does so in a spirit of corrosive and luxurious gossip—her voice, Yates says, had taken on "a voluptuous narrative pleasure." But she is doing, in this sense, no more than the novel itself has done; and if we find Mrs. Campbell's lingering and cruel narrative

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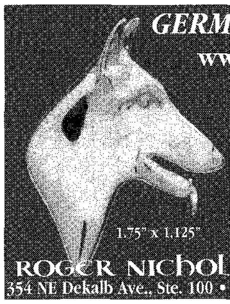

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offensive we shall have also to judge Yates's own lingering and cruel narrative, and our ready complicity in it. In its forty-seventh year, "Revolutionary Road" seems more radical than ever.

Yates's work is probably most radical in its obsessive treatment of the question of gender. (I suspect that this is where "Revolutionary Road" had the greatest influence on the conception and the narrative argument of the TV series "Mad Men.") His stories and novels return repeatedly to the weakness and hysterical anxiety of mid-century American masculinity. His fiction, begun in the early fifties and written throughout the next four decades, was closely shadowed by the Second World War. For Yates, that war seems to have functioned a little like an impossibly stern father: no performance would ever suffice. If you fought in it, you never fought bravely enough (Yates was anxious about the bravery of his own conduct in the 75th Division, in Europe); if you missed it, the rest of your life would be perforated with inadequacies. In the novel "Disturbing the Peace" (1975), John Wilder, a bipolar alcoholic obsessed with his shortness, angrily recalls that his father would always claim that his son fought in the Battle of the Bulge, but that this was not true. Andrew Crawford, in "The Easter Parade," is sexually impotent; perhaps not coincidentally, he was passed over for war service. The aimless and oafish Evan Shepard, in "Cold Spring Harbor" (1986), fails the military exam; it is downhill in his life from there.

Yates was, apparently, a relentlessly traditional man, who believed that women should have babies and stay at home. He cleaved to the unreconstructed rigors of alcoholism, Brooks Brothers, and homophobia. His biographer records an incident in which the novelist and his first wife were tussling over how to work the car heater. When she proved to be correct, he exploded, "Well, cut my penis off!" So it is a considerable tribute to his novelistic suppleness that he so ruthlessly dramatized male selfishness and insecurity. His men operate along a terribly narrow track, squeezed on one side by patriarchal expectation and on the other by female competition. Frank Wheeler feels outdone by the surpassing competence of his father's hands, "and the aura of mastery they imparted to everything Earl Wheeler used." Even on his deathbed, the father's hands "looked stronger and better than his son's." Yates acutely places gender at the center of "Revolutionary Road," by having April Wheeler propose that in Paris she work to support her ideally free husband. It could be said that the novel turns less on the question of abortion, or the stupor of the suburbs, or the timidity of Eisenhower conformists, than on the single question of whether a wife should be allowed to work. Frank nervously pictures this man-eating drone: "When she came home to the Paris apartment her spike-heeled pumps would click decisively on the tile floor and her hair would be pulled back into a neat bun; her face would be drawn with fatigue."

Frank absurdly lectures April about how wanting to have an abortion might be an expression of her desire to be a man—that she is trying to open herself up "so that the—you know—so that the penis could come out and hang down where it belonged." But the nice joke of the book is that Frank is the traditionally conceived "woman" of the house: he is hysterical, preening, an effeminate masquerader checking in mirrors the proper impact of his face, a parlor soldier. "Mad Men" uses the unfair wisdom of hindsight to mount an anti-masculinist case against the early nineteen-sixties that is also a feminist case: contemporary viewers can all be counted on to root for Peggy Olson (Elisabeth Moss), the secretary at Sterling Cooper, to be given her chance as a copywriter. Yates's work is not feminist, partly because it is much more interested in men than in women (only in his novel "The Easter Parade" did he ever display a systematic sympathy for a female character), and partly because its fanatical involvement with male anxiety comes to seem somewhat defensive. But, in a generation of male writers deeply invested in maintaining male status, it is Yates whose work most lucidly lays bare the bitter price of that investment for both sexes. "Cold Spring Harbor" recounts the useless and coolly adulterous life of Evan Shepard. In its closing pages, Evan hits his wife, Rachel, and, like John Fallon in "The B.A.R. Man," angrily runs out on her. Rachel consoles herself by looking after their newborn son. "Oh, you little marvel," she tells the baby. "You're a miracle. Because do you know what you're going to be? You're going to be a man." They are the novel's final words. ♦

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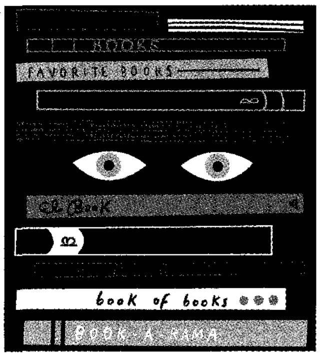

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CARTOONS AND ART

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PHOTOGRAPHY

Performance: Richard Avedon, *by Richard Avedon, André Gregory, John Lahr, Mike Nichols, Norma Stevens, Twyla Tharp, and Mitsuko Uchida (Abrams; $75).*

Burdock, *by Janet Malcolm (Yale; $65).*

AND . . .

Disquiet, Please!, *edited by David Remnick and Henry Finder (Random House; $30).*

THE CURRENT CINEMA

RING CYCLES

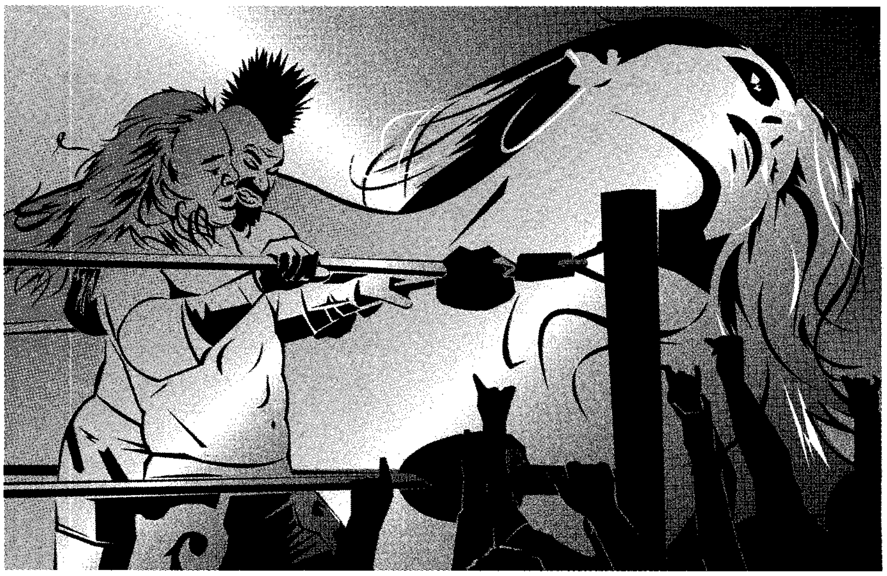
"The Wrestler," "The Reader," and "Doubt."

BY ANTHONY LANE

For some years, Mickey Rourke was just about my favorite movie star. This was not an easy stance to take. The body of the man's work was dismayingly thin, and the body of *good* work, from "Rumble Fish" onward, could be counted on the knuckles of one fist. As for the body of the man, it swelled from taut and slender to something so bulbous and spongiform that those of us who had thrilled to Boogie, his cocky romancer in "Diner," could only wince and look away. Yet I insist: there was a time when Rourke demanded to be looked at, catching and holding your eye no less grippingly than the young De Niro. Sweetness and menace were folded up in him—in the way that he angled himself at the world, as if both sure of his place within it and, deeper down, afraid that it might still spit him out. Hence the voice: never a bellow or a screech, nor yet a Brando-haunted mumble, but the soft croon of a conspirator; remember him as the arsonist for hire in "Body Heat," forcing his employers to lean in close lest they miss his wicked meaning. That whisper of secrecy remained in Stanley White, with his stiff gray hair, his long coat, and his vows of judicial vengeance. Stanley was the cop whom Rourke played in "Year of the Dragon," and everything about the project shouted overkill: script by Oliver Stone, direction by Michael Cimino, and a racial attitude that was designed to rile. But there was Rourke, holding steady at the core of the storm.

And now the voice is back. In "The Wrestler," directed by Darren Aronofsky, Rourke is Robin Ramzinski, known to his admirers as Randy (the Ram) Robinson. The body is now a glistening mound of bruised and damaged goods, and the quiff of Stanley White has been replaced by a mop of ropy blond extensions that you could wipe the floor with. Twenty years ago, as the opening credits show, Randy was a star on the wrestling circuit, but the film follows him as he burns away. He lives in a trailer in New Jersey, except that, right now, he doesn't; the landlord has locked him out for not paying the rent. Randy joshes with the local kids, and plays Nintendo with one of them—"a really old game," according to the boy, who is used to Call of Duty. Such is modern senescence: to age as quickly as a video game. Randy still wrestles, but the cash is petty, and he boosts his income by heaving boxes at a supermarket. He has a friend, a stripper named Cassidy (Marisa Tomei), but she has no plans to be his girlfriend. Then, there is Stephanie (Evan Rachel Wood), his daughter, although they haven't met in years. When they do hook up, things improve—too fast, it turns out, as if reconciliation were more of a dream than a practical goal. They book a dinner, but Randy gets drunk, misses the date, and loses her once more. "An old, broken-down piece of meat," he calls himself. "I'm alone, and I deserve to be alone."

To some extent, as that speech suggests, "The Wrestler" is as simple as its title. The pathos of personal ruin is an established trope, and the trick, as demonstrated by John Huston in "Fat City" and by Martin Scorsese in "Raging Bull," is to stop it from sliding into the sentimental. Aronofsky doesn't always succeed in this, and there are lines in Robert D. Siegel's script that wave their symbolic purpose in the audience's face: "It's your heart—you need to start taking better care of it." So says a hospital medic, when Randy is admitted, and undergoes bypass surgery, after collapsing in the wake of a bout. It's O.K., Doc, we get the point. But the movie, like its hero, manages to yank itself back into shape, and that, it strikes me, is mostly due to Rourke. When Randy goes home after the operation, and peels off his bandage, the camera zooms in to inspect the scar on his chest, whereas what really pinches our attention is his harmless habits: the mild, uncomplaining manner in which he pops in a hearing aid or adjusts his reading spectacles. He may be one of the last people in movies to use a pay phone. This fellow is mutton dressed as Ram, and he knows it, and, if he earns the caress of our pity, that is precisely because he never stoops to beg for it.



Mickey Rourke as Randy (the Ram) Robinson in Darren Aronofsky's movie.

There is no denying the brutality of "The Wrestler," and some of the scenes in the ring, especially those which provoke the cardiac arrest, are hard to watch. The movie comes off as inoffensive, however, since, unusually for these times, it trades in violence cleansed of ill will. The wrestlers are a club, greeting one another

GUICKHONEV

as brothers in arms, or in headlocks; one of them cheerfully sells Randy almost a thousand dollars' worth of steroids and other drugs, and, in place of the hypocritical masking that bedevils major sports, there is a peculiar honesty, almost a decorum, running beneath the overcooked beefcake and the staged aggression of the fights. "What do you want to do tonight?" one opponent asks Randy, as if inviting him to the theatre, before proposing that he enliven that evening's bout by puncturing his rival with a staple gun. You could call them cardboard characters, pierced and flattened for the delight of the crowd, but Aronofsky cast the minor roles with real wrestlers, and you believe in every scourging of the flesh.

For all that, the best sequence in the film, even more likely to lodge in your mind than the soaring sadness of the climax, takes place not on the wrestlers' canvas, with its carpet of blood and broken glass, but at the deli counter of the supermarket. Here Randy, needing the money, dons a protective hairnet and doles out pasta salad. He even pins on a name tag that says "Robin," randiness being too rich for this clientele. The dent to his pride is profound, more wounding than any professional blow to the head, and the scene closes in agony, as he takes out his frustration on a meat slicer. But here's the thing: while the job lasts, he's pretty good at it, bringing a brief shaft of pleasure to the customers, and suffering any taunts that come his way. What Rourke offers us, in short, is not just a comeback performance but something much rarer: a rounded, raddled portrait of a good man. Suddenly, there it is again—the charm, the anxious modesty, the never-distant hint of wrath, the teen-age smiles, and all the other virtues of a winner. No wonder people warmed to Randy Robinson twenty years ago. I felt the same about Mickey Rourke, and I still do.

For those who think of cinema as dramatic roughage, "The Reader" should prove sufficiently indigestible. Directed by Stephen Daldry, and adapted by David Hare from the novel by Bernhard Schlink, it stars Kate Winslet as Hanna Schmitz, a tram conductor in the German town of Neustadt. In 1958, she embarks on an affair with a fifteen-year-old schoolboy named Michael (David Kross). "Look at me, kid," she says, casually adopting the Humphrey Bogart position. They fall into the swing of a routine: first he reads to her, then they make love. In many ways, the ideal existence.

Time slouches on, and, in 1966, Michael, now a law student, sees Hanna again, this time in a courtroom, where she is being tried for her actions as an S.S. guard. He should be shocked by this revelation, but Kross—who, I regret to say, is borderline bovine throughout—merely lowers his muzzle and pants a bit, and Daldry himself seems to miss the moment, as if he had spent too long chewing it over. The whole film, in fact, with its loping pace and plaintive score, feels like a woefully polite, not to say British, take on a foreign horror; was there really no one, from the fierce new wave of German filmmakers, prepared to dramatize the Schlink? Or did they feel, as I did, that it was pernicious from the start—a low-grade musing on atrocity, garnished with erotic titillation? Imprisoned for life, Hanna must read to herself, but are we really supposed to be moved by the thought—or now, in Daldry's film, by the sight—of an unrepentant Nazi parsing Chekhov? That is not culturally nourishing; it is morally famished. There is a fine scene, near the end, when a survivor of Hanna's crimes (the great Lena Olin) tells the middle-aged Michael (Ralph Fiennes) that "nothing came out of the camps," that they "weren't therapy." Quite true, so why has the film pretended otherwise?

Still, "The Reader" is a triumph of bite and speed compared with "Doubt." This film, written and directed by John Patrick Shanley, who adapted it from his own play, unfolds in 1964, at a Catholic school in the Bronx. A jovial priest, Father Flynn (Philip Seymour Hoffman), is accused by the principal, Sister Aloysius (Meryl Streep), of interfering with an altar boy. He denies it, she yearns to believe it, and we don't care. Collectors of large narrative signposts will spend a happy couple of hours at Shanley's movie, enjoying the window-rattling thunderstorms that he uses to indicate spiritual crisis, and the grimness with which Sister Aloysius, narrowing her red-rimmed eyes, delivers the line "So, it's happened." I didn't know you could hiss, groan, and murmur at the same time, but Streep can do anything. She is, of course, wasted on this elephantine fable; if only "Doubt" had been made *in* 1964, shot by Roger Corman over a long weekend, and retitled "Spawn of the Devil Witch" or "Blood Wimple," all would have been forgiven. ♦

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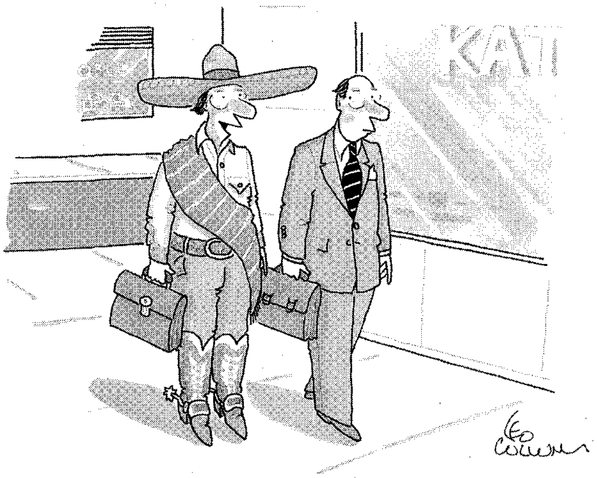
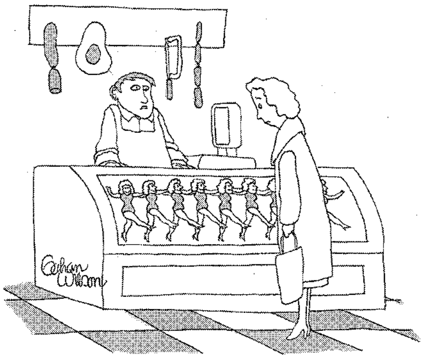
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Tom Cheney, must be received by Sunday, December 14th. Finalists in the December 1st contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the January 5th issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"What makes you think I wouldn't be up for sushi?"
Neal Svalstad, El Cajon, Calif.



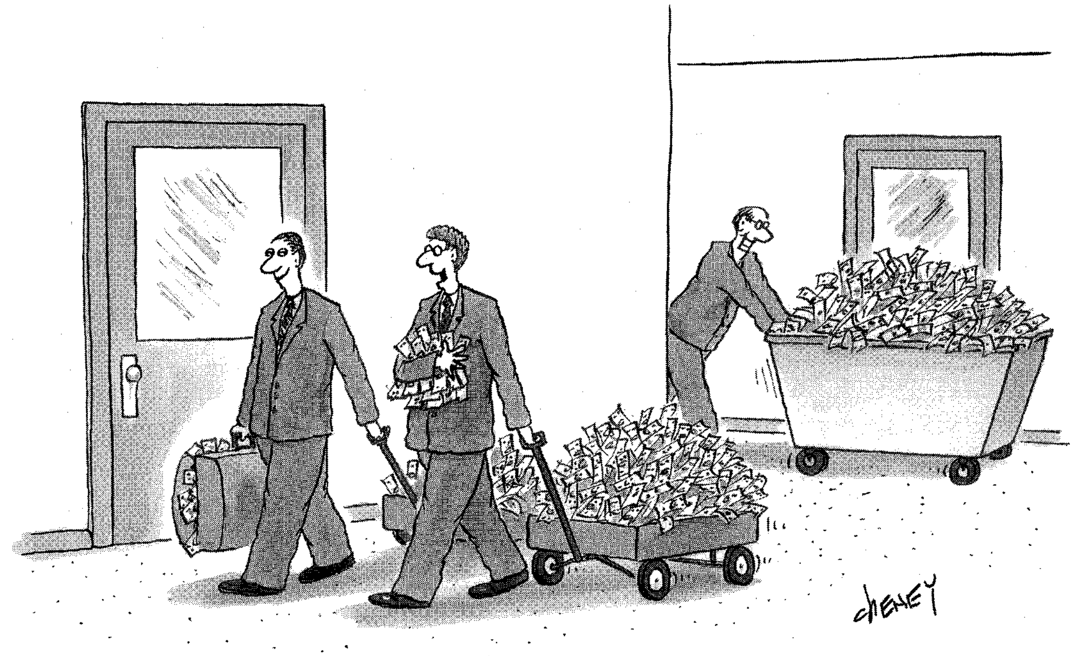
THE FINALISTS

"I'd suggest you keep them away from the gingerbread men."
Vincent Coca, Staten Island, N.Y.

"It's not disturbing until someone wants to buy them by the ounce."
Steve Arrowood, Oceanside, Calif.

"I did the choreography myself."
Donovan Reeve, Ypsilanti, Mich.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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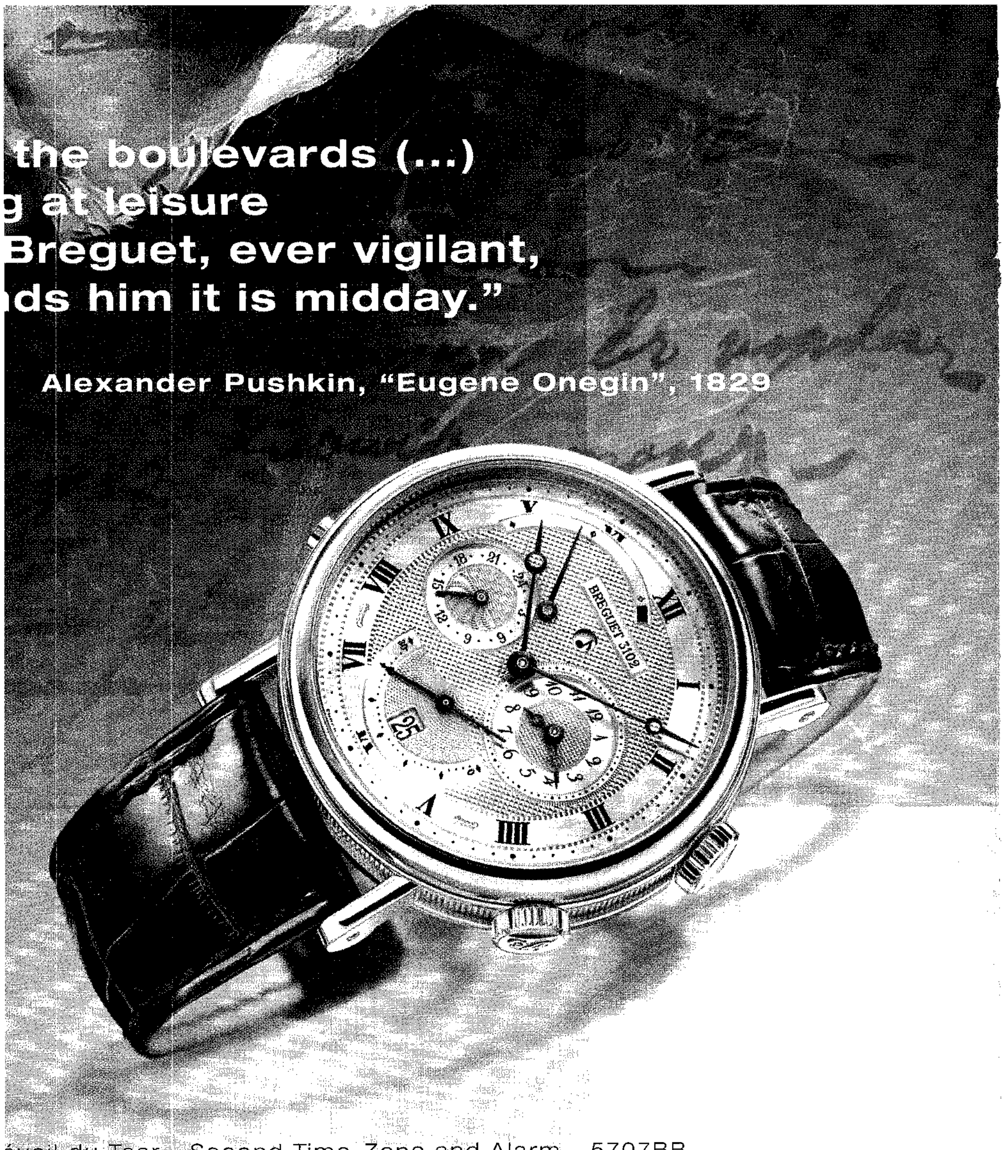

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Alexander Pushkin, “Eugene Onegin”, 1829

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